

**Homework:**  
**Disrupting National Imaginaries with Testimonial Public Art and  
Visual Culture**

**A Thesis Submitted to the College of Graduate Studies and  
Research in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree  
of Master of Arts in the Department of Art and Art History  
University of Saskatchewan Saskatoon**

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## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	. . . . .	iii
List of Illustrations	. . . . .	vi
Introduction: Hometown	. . . . .	1
Chapter 1 Photo Essay	. . . . .	17
Chapter 1 – Away	. . . . .	24
Chapter 2 Photo Essay	. . . . .	37
Chapter 2 – Home	. . . . .	53
Part 1 – Is this our Canada?	. . . . .	54
Part 2 – Homework	. . . . .	64
Conclusion Photo Essay	. . . . .	82
Conclusion: Homegrown	. . . . .	85
Bibliography	. . . . .	99

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Finally, to the Missing Women of Canada, more needs to be done to find you; in this paper I add my voice to the powerful collective action calling for justice on your behalf. I dedicate this paper to you. As the Idle No More movement and Defendant of the Land Archives note, there has to be a national inquiry in Canada for the murdered and missing Indigenous women.

## List of Illustrations

### Chapter 1 Photo Essay

Figure	Page
1.1 William Railton, <i>Nelson's Column</i> , 1839-1843	26
1.2 Trafalgar Square, London, England	28
1.3 The Fourth Plinth, Trafalgar Square, London, England	28
1.4 Marc Quinn, <i>Alison Lapper Pregnant</i> , 2005	28
1.5 Michelangelo, <i>David</i> , Completed 1504	28
1.6 William Railton, <i>Nelson's Column</i> , 1839-1843	31
1.7 Marc Quinn, <i>Alison Lapper Pregnant</i> , 2005	31
1.8 Artist Unknown, <i>Venus de Milo</i> , Between 130 and 100 BC	33
1.9 Yinka Shonibare, <i>Message in a Bottle</i> , 2010	35
1.10 Yinka Shonibare, <i>Message in a Bottle</i> , 2010	35
1.11 Ingar Dragset and Michael Elmgreen, <i>Powerless Structures</i> <i>Fig. 101</i> , 2012	36

### Chapter 2 Photo Essay

2.1 Vancouver 2010 Olympic Mascots	56
2.2 Aboriginal Dancers at the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Opening Ceremonies	56
2.3 Jeff Vinnick (emblem designer), <i>Vancouver 2010 Emblem</i> , 2010	57
2.4 Aboriginal Dancers at the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Opening Ceremonies	58

	Page
2.5 Opening Ceremonies of the Vancouver 2010 Olympics	58
2.6 Eve Harlow (photo credit), <i>HBC Display Window</i> , 2010	60
2.7 Alex Hundert, <i>Blood On Your Hands</i> , 2010	60
2.8 <i>No Time for the Olympics</i> , 2007	60
2.9 Anti-Olympic Torch Light Parade, 2009	61
2.10 Jeff Vinnick (emblem designer), <i>Vancouver 2010 Emblem</i> , 2010	62
2.11 Pac Man	63
2.12 Shannen Koostachin speaking at the <i>National Day of Action</i> in Ottawa, 2008	65
2.13 Attawapiskat grade 8 classroom	65
2.14 Attawapiskat school door	65
2.15 Letters from school children	66
2.16 North Shore Micmac Distract FASD Youth Forum, 2011	67
2.17 Letters from school children	67
2.18 Shannen's Dream Day of Action in Ottawa, April 27, 2011	67
2.19 Amnesty International, Stolen Sisters	73
2.20 Lori Blondeau and Dana Claxton, <i>Redskin Imaginary</i> , 2010	76
2.21 Lori Blondeau and Dana Claxton, <i>Redskin Imaginary</i> , 2010	76
2.22 Lori Blondeau and Dana Claxton, <i>Redskin Imaginary</i> , 2010	77
2.23 Lori Blondeau, <i>Lonely Surfer Squaw</i> , 1997	77

	Page
2.24 Rebecca Belmore, <i>Vigil</i> , 2002	79
2.25 Rebecca Belmore, <i>Vigil</i> , 2002	79
2.26 Rebecca Belmore, <i>Vigil</i> , 2002	79

### Conclusion Photo Essay

3.1 Adrian Wylde (photo credit), Idle No More protests, 11 January 2013	85
3.2 Chris Wattie/Reuters (photo credit), <i>Idle No More Day of Action Sweeps Turtle Island and Beyond</i> , 28 January 2013	86
3.3 Dwayne Bird, <i>Stand Up! Don't Give Up the Fight!</i> , 12 December 2012	86
3.4 Fred Chartrand (photo credit), <i>Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence</i> , 11 January 2013	88
3.5 <i>Idle No More, Flashmob in Seattle</i> , 25 December 2012	89

## Introduction

### Hometown

*In the beginning is the invention of the beginning. Every society has its epic, its “tale of the tribe,” its invention of “us.” In many ways, there is no “us” until “us” has created its own poetry. And it always begins at the beginning: the origin of the universe, followed in turn by an age of gods (now lost and usually lamented), the creation of man, and the founding of one’s own people, who are celebrated for their rites and accomplishments (ancient valorization for current practices), their legendary or historical heroes. There are descents to the kingdom of the dead to learn the wisdom of “our” departed. And, most important, there is the definition of “us” by contrast to the (usually subjugated) “others.” That description of the “others” is, however, propagandistic, the first ethnography, the admission of the alien into the discourse, the beginning of the continuing nourishing of a culture. Eliot Weinberger<sup>1</sup>*

*When the Elders come together, the stories begin to flow. One Elder alone has many stories, but when a number of Elders are placed in the same room, the stories multiply. One Elder may know part of a story and another will know the rest of the story. Together, the Elders tell the history of the nation. Narrative is a powerful method for teaching many things, including the history of an oral people. The key is to listen and learn. Sharon Venne<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Eliot Weinberger, *Outside Stories* (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1992) 4.

<sup>2</sup> Sharon Venne, “Understanding Treaty 6: An Indigenous Perspective,” *Essays on Law, Equality, and Respect for Difference* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997) 176.

My Master of Arts research has been a journey. Sitting down to write this introduction I have a long list of contributing factors and experiences that have led me to spend a few years of my life pondering several questions. It could be argued that I have been pondering the answers to these questions for much longer, beginning in elementary school. In the following I will be speaking personally about my experiences as a white, heterosexual girl growing up in rural Saskatchewan on Treaty 6 land, who questioned what it was to be normal and/or different within the spaces and times that I have inhabited. I will explain how I have used these factors and experiences as a motor, carrying me through my research.

Our body is our closest environment. An environment can include forms that are partially natural or unnatural. The urban landscape is made of some natural elements including trees and grass in yards and parks but overall this environment has been designed for comfortable human inhabitants and now includes plastic, sky trains and Starbucks coffee shops. Animals also belong to the natural world but through breeding and domestication, we have designed animals to fit the human desire for love and obedience as well as food and labour. Naturally, we are also born into bodies, which are constantly being created and recreated with the impact of media, advertisements and fashion and in more physical ways such as aging, illness or pregnancy. Judith Butler theorizes:

There is a tendency to think that sexuality is either constructed or determined; to think that if it is constructed, it is in some sense free, and if determined; it is in some sense fixed. These oppositions do not describe the complexity of what is at stake in any effort to take account of the conditions under which sex and sexuality are assumed. The “performative” dimension of construction is precisely the forced reiteration of norms. In this sense, then, it is not only that there are constraints to performativity; rather, constraint calls to be rethought as the very condition of performativity.

Performativity is neither free play nor theatrical self-presentation; nor can it be simply equated with

performance. Moreover, constraint is not necessarily that which sets a limit to performativity; constraint is, rather, that which impels and sustains performativity.<sup>3</sup>

Our bodies are regulated in part by a set of societal norms that both produce and constrain us, pushing against these norms we both constitute and redefine our ‘selves,’ in relationship to ‘others,’ and our environments, which can be scary for some.

I grew up in rural Saskatchewan. The family acreage provided a romantic ideal of childhood for my siblings and myself: we rode horses and played with our cats and dogs, built tree forts in summer and quinsies in winter, and took part in any and all outdoor activities. My brother and sister and I were taught by our biologist/nature admirer father and sensitive-soul/gardening enthusiast mother to respect the environment and each other. We hunted and grew our own food, we learned about the wildlife that co-existed with our family of people. Even the cats and dogs played together and the horses never seemed to mind sharing their oats with the deer. However, this written description of utopia only goes on for so long. For some reason, I always felt a level of animosity towards the small town our acreage bordered. I never understood until much later why I felt this way. I was happy within the embrace of my family, but I also felt trapped, and my family felt isolated from the people we shared our postal code with.

My Aunti has always been known simply as Aunti. It is significant that I explain the importance of the title “Aunti.” My sister, brother and I felt that Aunti was as central to our lives as Mom and Dad, therefore she was and still is known simply as Aunti; even into adulthood this title is considered an honour in our family. Aunti is my mother’s younger sister. Her first name is Colleen but she goes by the name Turtle. For the purpose of this paper I will continue to call her Aunti.

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<sup>3</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (Routledge: New York, 1993) 94, 95.



I felt the small community I grew up in was not accepting of difference. Aunti lived in the same small town as we did, with her best friend Sheila. Aunti and Sheila did everything together. I have one very clear memory of staying at their house for a sleepover when I was about 9 years old. At sleepovers I would stay in Sheila's room and Sheila would have to sleep with my Aunti. Before bed on this particular night I came into my Aunti's room and asked Sheila if she was "mad that I had taken her room" and that "she would have to share." Sheila answered with "I don't mind." As a child I had never heard of one woman loving another the way I saw my parents loving each other, but at that second, I was pretty sure that Sheila and my Aunti loved each other.

Around the same time, I became more aware of rumours spreading around town about 'the lesbians' who lived together. The kids at school teased me and asked me if my Aunti was gay. My cousins, the children of my mother's brother, endured more aggressive taunting of an extremely derogative nature. It wasn't until Aunti and Sheila broke-up that she officially came out to our family and to the community as a result. By that time Aunti had moved away to a larger centre where she felt she could exist as who she was: a lesbian.

The social anxiety that followed Aunti's coming-out in small-town Saskatchewan in the 1990s affected my family in a number of ways. My siblings, cousins and I were bullied. My parents were also asked inappropriate questions on a regular basis. I always wondered if the hostility my aunti experienced within the hetero-normative and heterosexist Saskatchewan community we lived in kept my aunt 'home.' When she left, my family changed in a lot of ways.

As a child, being on the receiving end of 'teasing' about my aunt's sexuality, made me more aware of the violence of bullying, especially when one is being teased for something that

absolutely cannot be changed, namely a person's sexuality. The hostility my aunt experienced in our small-town was an important learning moment in my childhood. This memory was seen through a child's eye but now as an adult I can learn from this experience by looking through a critical lens. Butler notes that the dominant assumption of heterosexual normativity, and the sources of power that attempt to govern and police certain positions of femininity are based on a prior prohibition of same sex desire.<sup>4</sup>

As a child, I barely understood this situation of sexual difference. I was unaware of how I was caught in, and shaped by, small-town Saskatchewan values and norms of Christianity about the traditional nuclear family and hetero-normative behaviour and reproductive paradigms. Looking back from this perspective I see how this dominant hetero-normative economy of settler-colonial Saskatchewan saturated my early life and critical thinking. I began my studies at university in studio art and art history; here I began to reflect on how small-town community life can erode not only an individual's rights but also their performance of identity and sense of self, generating a series of corporeal anxieties and rebellions.

In high school, abstinence and scare-tactics were the preferred method of sex-education in the community. I found this extremely problematic. Unfortunately, my friends and I learned about sex from American magazines claiming to teach us all the tricks needed to seduce men. I knew very few teen mothers, but there were countless pregnancy scares amongst my circle of friends; contraceptives weren't a problem to get but learning about our options was up to us. In grade 12 drama we were assigned to present a topic: I chose birth control. I learned as much as was possible, given the information I had at hand (I only had dial-up internet and sifting through all the web-pages to confirm what was fact or fiction was difficult for a teen). I presented a sex-education lesson to my classmates and received a good grade. The decision or

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<sup>4</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (Routledge: New York, 1993) 12.

indecision to teach us, as high school students, what our options were in regards to reproductive health was, in my opinion, part of a culture of denial in regards to the sexuality of teens.

Courses that promoted abstinence upheld a proper image, but they didn't teach us to respect our bodies or each other's bodies. Rather, they taught us to ignore our bodies because the pubescent body was a site of anxiety. In these courses, we were shown images of sexually transmitted infections and explained the risks of sex. Sex does have many risks, and for a teenager it also has emotional and psychological risks. The problem with this form of education is that it doesn't properly prepare those who still wish to have sex.

Many would argue that sex education is up to the parents and not educational institutions. This is partially true. My point is that often, our closest environments are left as a mystery. Normal is assumed and sifting through what makes sense for any individual is about as difficult as, well, trying to research birth control with dial-up Internet.

Looking back, I realize that in school I also learnt about cultural difference, colonialism and the historical power of racializing discourse. In the elementary curriculum I remember learning about residential schools; the Hudson Bay Company; Louis Riel; and treaties; as well as settler history in the elementary curriculum. *Native Studies* was an elective that could be used towards a social science credit; it also had a reputation for being an "easy class." The instructor was a great resource as he had taught at a reserve earlier in his still young career. What was alarming was the racist attitudes of my classmates, which to be truthful, wasn't anything new. My fellow students often challenged the instructor when he taught lessons in treaty rights, colonial contact and the current state of colonialism. I felt these debates were a different sort of education for me; I had been taught that racism was bad but yet here were very violent displays

of hatred in a classroom of people who were my friends. Racism was and is alive and well in small-town Saskatchewan.

Several of my classmates from elementary and high school were Aboriginal and Métis; they were, however, in the minority. Bullying separated ‘them’ from ‘us’; something that I learned divided the margins from the centre. Obviously these attitudes came from generations of hatred and perhaps denial and can’t be solved by several decent, curriculum-based lessons.

Exposure to difference was something my parents tried to implement at home. In middle school my mom took my sister and myself to a production of Eve Ensler’s *The Vagina Monologues*: this rocked my world. I had never seen such a display of feminine celebration. Up until then, being called a girl was synonymous with “wimp,” but suddenly ‘girl’ meant strong. In my first year of undergraduate studies at the University of Saskatchewan, I auditioned for *The Vagina Monologues* and played the part of the little girl and one of the girls who spoke about their experiences with menstruation. On stage I felt empowered: an important part of feminism in Saskatoon. Behind the scenes, I was exposed to feminist conversations about birth control, plastic surgery, motherhood, relationships, and female-rights-of-passage. I listened but could rarely contribute. Unfortunately, at the time, my own body was a bit of a mystery.

The reason I moved to Saskatoon was to pursue a fine arts degree. As it happens, once I arrived at art school I wasn’t sure what I wanted to make art about. The first year of my undergraduate degree I took introduction level art history. I enjoyed it but felt a little lost until we started learning about contemporary art. Watching the video, *Couple in the Cage* (1993) by the performance artists Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña rocked my world, yet again. I

hadn't even known about performance art before this screening, and I didn't know that art could be a catalyst for social change.

I spent a great deal of my undergraduate years researching the performance troupe *La Pocha Nostra*. The idea of using one's body as the medium to make art was a liberating notion. Using the body as subject matter was something important to investigate. I was inspired by artists such as Annie Sprinkle, Marlene Dumont and by movements such as *The Suicide Girls* and the *Guerilla Girls*. From these artists I learned about representing bodies and doing so in a way that allowed for social messages to be the subject matter such as sexuality, gender and desire. Sprinkle celebrates sex and sex work; Dumont represents sex workers in her art in a positive manner; *The Suicide Girls* movement denotes women with "alternative" appearances and life-styles; and *The Guerilla Girls* are a group of women who fight institutional discrimination with performance and poster art. The idea that art could be a public forum for debate on urgent issues outside of galleries was important to me. I had grown up in a town that, at the time, had no local art galleries. Public art is accessible for those who do not feel comfortable in galleries or cannot access them. It addresses a large and heterogeneous audience. Learning about those who are "unspeakable" or silenced in other site-specific contexts allowed me to think about my own life-lessons in difference.

Difference, I have found is a difficult topic to discuss. Initially, in this paper, I focused on certain bodies when thinking through difference. What I have found is that it is important to research the often "unspeakable" silence that surrounds cultural difference, and to investigate the politics of 'how,' 'when,' and 'where' the dominant group or mainstream decides what bodies are legitimate and which bodies are "unspeakable." Difference is everywhere but

initially there will always be a process of contestation, negotiation and decoding within a particular context.

In recent years, the study of the body has developed rapidly across many disciplines, including visual art, art history, gender and cultural studies, queer theory and sociology among others. In regards to the body, definitions of the “human,” “sub-human,” “acceptable,” “unspeakable” and “non-human” vary widely depending on the societal context. In Western culture, artists have introduced new bodies and ideas to viewers. What may have been unspeakable a century ago, such as the queer body and self-asserting sexual female body, is now more commonplace, although there is still resistance. The introduction of new and unspeakable bodies is always met with controversy. Often the contested unspeakable body is not new but rather is brought into visibility in public spaces that have been purposed for the representation of normative dominant bodies that ‘belonged.’

The visual cultural texts, which have informed this paper, have helped me think about identity (personal, community, institutional, national) as “learned social understandings” through cultural difference that can be analyzed, interrogated and thought otherwise. My archives of cultural texts on the body includes creative art works, art events and the work of cultural theorists including Judith Butler’s writings on gender normativity; the performative process of being ‘girled’; and her account of the injuries inflicted by the regulatory apparatus of heterosexuality. Elspeth Probyn’s theories on sexy bodies and shaming in society; Rosalyn Dispose’s theories on public perceptions of pregnant women; and Carol Thomas’ analysis of the representation of pregnant women with disabilities.

This paper has two aims; one is to reflect on the figure of the “unspeakable” body in collective national memory, past and present; the second aim is to ask questions about the role

of art and visual culture in contesting, decoding and re-figuring discourses of national identity and the ideal citizenry. The questions contemplated include:

- How does the nation-state use visual experience and expression to dramatize its own authority? How does it use visual culture to build the idea of shared collective values and a unified national history and culture across multiple ‘imagined communities’ of speakers, listeners, artists, viewers, writers, and readers (Anderson, 1983).
- How does the nation-state mobilize visual culture to inspire identification, service and sacrifice?
- How and when does visual imagery and culture help us think critically about what it means to be Canadian, here and now? How does it help us think about the institutions and discourses that structure “common sense” in Canadian society?
- How and when does contemporary art and visual culture open up a space for a plurality of diverse subjects and voices to be heard and seen in public spaces?
- How does art and visual culture engage with the questions: Whose lives are valued? Whose lives/bodies are “unspeakable”? Whose lives/deaths are grievable?

In thinking about the questions I address in this thesis, I have assembled a rich archive of visual theory and expression, across media, genres and contexts. The visual case-studies I explore focus on visual and cultural encounters in a number of public sites, including public memorial sculpture at the heart of a nation’s capital; the public spectacle of the Vancouver Olympics; digital media on activist websites; and performance art on urban street corners and public centres. These case-studies foreground the work and visual theory of artists such as

Alison Lapper, Marc Quinn, Yinka Shonibare, Rebecca Belmore and Lori Blondeau, among others.

In chapter one, entitled “Away,” I travel to London, England, to consider the role that public sculpture in Trafalgar Square, at the heart of the city, has played in the long-term identification of England with the fantasy work of Empire and its associated notions of racial and patriarchal privilege. Reading the white marble stones in this public memorial space I encounter a succession of triumphant, heroic, male, white, dead citizens. For some, these stone figures will provide inspiration and consolation: a personal identification with national ancestors. Others will not feel a connection to these cultural and political icons. In choosing to begin my thesis journey in Trafalgar Square, my focus is on what has become known as “The Fourth Plinth Project.” In this ongoing public art project we see how visual culture is used to open up a space in which notions of empire, national identity, cultural heritage, and the ideal citizen-subject are contested, interrogated, deconstructed and re-figured.

In beginning my thesis project on the visual representation of “unspeakable bodies” in public space, my attention was first caught by Marc Quinn’s collaboration with Alison Lapper on the Fourth Plinth Project in Trafalgar Square: this memorable moment of visual indiscipline and counter-memory generated a storm of media coverage in which the corporeal politics of the nation’s public memory work was fiercely debated. Since this sculptural event by Quinn and Lapper, other fourth plinth projects have also engaged in revitalizing national memory work, reminding us that the national imaginary (official or popular) is never closed and finished; rather, it is ongoing, contested, and always in process.

In the Fourth Plinth Project, artists are thinking together the symbolic nation, as represented in the towering statue of Nelson and the sculptures on the other three plinths, and, the actual



‘national’ community in all its diversity and heterogeneity. In doing this, they are opening up a public debate about whose lives are valuable and worth remembering, and, whose lives have so far been ignored, excluded and rendered “unspeakable.” In writing about The Fourth Plinth Project and its interrogation of the fictions of national identity and all those it has othered – non-western peoples, women, pregnant women, children, the masses, the illiterate, the supposedly pre-modern or primitive, the differently abled, the mentally ill – I have been informed by the work of the cultural critic Stuart Hall: over several decades Hall has cast a critical anthropological gaze on the modern and historical nation of England. In an interview, *Personally Speaking*, the cultural theorist Stuart Hall talks about identity in terms of collective and personal history.<sup>5</sup> Individual identity is a person's experiences and narratives - signifiers of being. Collective identity includes the narratives nations choose to include and embrace. In a sense, collective identity is imaginary because it is inclusive and it is always contested.<sup>6</sup>

In his essay, “The Multi-Cultural Question,” for example, Hall notes that the heterogeneity and pluralism of the contemporary nation is provoking a critical debate about national identity, history, race, class, sex and gender. In this essay, Hall makes a distinction between the multicultural frames of global corporate capital that harness difference to sell commodities, and, the present concerns of the country’s multi-cultural communities who are demanding a more open, transparent and communal form of politics. Hall notes that the multi-cultural question is three-fold: it is a call for racial justice, for equality, and difference. In contrast to the homogenous unified national culture represented in the traditional sculptures of Trafalgar Square, the sculptural events of the fourth plinth are clearly contesting, deconstructing and refiguring any singular notion of national identity, opening up an ongoing conversation about

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<sup>5</sup> *Personally speaking - A Long Conversation with Stuart Hall*, interview by Maya Jaggi (Media Education Foundation, 2009) DVD.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

the process of finding “commonness in difference.” As Hall argues, it is desirable to have a nation that as a political entity embraces a framework of multi-culturalism in which difference (rather than assimilation) is seen to be an essential part of the nation; and that ongoing dialogue, contestation and revitalization are not about civil unrest and disobedience but, rather, the promise and potential of democracy.<sup>7</sup>

In chapter two, entitled “Home,” I return to Canada and focus my discussion on how Canadian artists and activists are using art and visual culture as sites to renew and revitalize the way in which they represent or imagine themselves as a nation-state in the political present tense across a number of public locations. These public sites include: the visual spectacle of the opening ceremonies of the 2010 Vancouver Olympics and the street demonstrations outside the Games; the activist website of the Indigenous lawyer, Cindy Blackstock, and its effective use of digital media – short video clips, photo galleries, and memes – to construct a notion of the citizen as an informed agent (from childhood on) who is willing to act and engage in the question: Is this our Canada?; and finally, in the work of the Indigenous artists Rebecca Belmore, Lori Blondeau and Dana Claxton, who use the extraordinary force of performance and installation art as a mechanism for the performer and the viewer-participant to experience and re-experience difficult testimony about Canada’s history, past and present, in a series of memorial performances about the Stolen Sisters.

Just a few preliminary remarks about the concepts I am working with in this thesis. I am using the concept of “Canada” here as an assumed engagement of ‘imagined communities of citizens with collective institutions, discourses and daily habits and rituals such as watching CBC news or listening to CBC radio; reading national and local newspapers; watching ‘our’

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<sup>7</sup> Stuart Hall, “The Multicultural Question,” *Pavis Papers in Social and Cultural Research*, No.4. (The Open University, 2001).

team at the Olympics or in local provincial sports; using a passport; acknowledging the flag; celebrating Canada Day and centennials; among other unifying activities. “Canada,” here, also means thinking critically about the worldviews, values, norms and histories of the nation’s collective “we,” and, the affect or emotions that inherited practices, institutions and discourses generate in order to make them meaningful (or not) to national subjects, binding them together as a collective.

In talking about “Canada,” my thinking has been influenced by the theory of Indigenous artists and activists as well as the Report of the Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP 1996). This collection of written and visual texts speak to the fact that Canada has been (and still is) profoundly implicated in colonial practices that most often refuse to acknowledge the nation’s Indigenous foundations. I have also been influenced by the media coverage of the Attawapiskat First Nation crisis and the underfunding of reserves by the Canadian federal government; the activist Cindy Blackstock’s online campaigns, and the Amnesty International Report on the *Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Discrimination and Violence Against Indigenous Women in Canada* (2004). As John Ralston Saul notes in his book, *A Fair Country: Telling Truths About Canada* (2008):

We are a Métis civilization.

What we are today has been inspired as much by four centuries of life with the Indigenous civilizations as it has by four centuries of immigration. Perhaps more. Today we are the outcome of that experience. As have Métis people, Canadians in general have been heavily influenced and shaped by the First Nations. We are still. We increasingly are. This influencing, this shaping is deep within us.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> John Ralston Saul, *A Fair Country: Telling Truths About Canada* (Toronto: Penguin Group, 2009) 3.

In thinking about visual culture in the public sphere, I am not thinking of a single public sphere but of multiple public spaces and projects created by differing communities as they are pulled into the democratic process: these spaces are interrelated in an always contested conceptual economy. When I talk about the use of visual imagery in public art, events and memorials, I am, again, thinking of national memory work as an ongoing, always-in-process, and contested project. In using the term visual culture I am referring to “the interdisciplinary study of human visual experience and expression.”<sup>9</sup> Like W.J.T. Mitchell, I understand art and visual culture to be both theory and practice. I also understand the term public visual culture to cover the official and the popular, the national, institutional, discursive, and personal.

As well as looking at visual art and reading cultural theory, the “field” has proved to be an inspiration for my chosen case-studies. I attended the 2010 Vancouver Olympics, which provided me with an entry point to the chapter *Home*. While there, I experienced first-hand, the popular representations of “Canadianna” as well as the resistance to said representation. In November of 2011 I attended a lecture by Cindy Blackstock who made me think again about the official Canadian imaginary as a Just society, when she explained the ongoing crisis on many Canadian reserves, including Attawapiskat. In the summer of 2010, I travelled to New York as a part of a *Women and Gender Studies* course on the representation and embodiment of cities. This experience was unbelievably helpful in understanding queer theory and difficult knowledge in regards to gender studies – specifically feminism. On this trip, I was exposed to art at the Museum of Modern Art, The Brooklyn Museum of Art and the Guggenheim. I explored and thought critically about the Museum of Natural History and The Museum of the American Indian.

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<sup>9</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Live and Loves of Images* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005) 6.

While writing the conclusion to this paper the movement “Idle No More” is gathering momentum and protesting across the globe. This movement began at home in Saskatchewan, which inspired my conclusion to this paper. Following this movement, as it continues to gather momentum, provides both an ‘ending’ and a ‘beginning’ to my thesis project entitled Homework.

## Chapter 1 Photo Essay



Figure 1.1 William Railton, *Nelson's Column*, 1839-1843. Pg.26



Figure 1.2 Trafalgar Square, London, England. Pg. 28



Figure 1.3 The Fourth Plinth, Trafalgar Square, London, England. Pg. 28



Figure 1.4 Marc Quinn, *Alison Lapper Pregnant*, 2005. Pg. 28



Figure 1.5 Michelangelo, *David*, Completed 1504. Pg. 28



Figure 1.6 William Railton, *Nelson's Column*, 1839-1843. Pg. 31





Figure 1.7 Marc Quinn, *Alison Lapper Pregnant*, 2005. Pg. 31

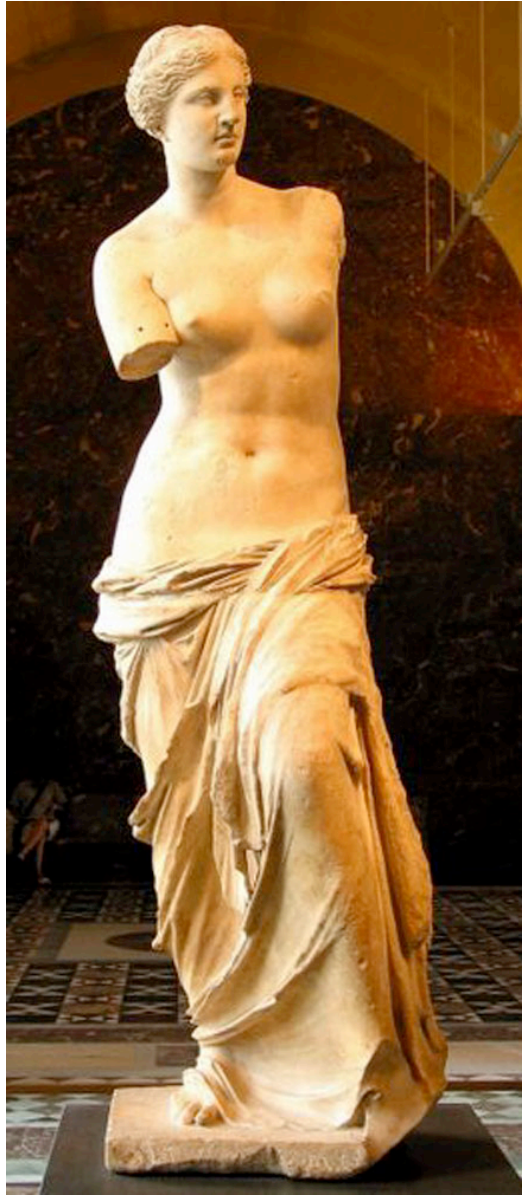


Figure 1.8 Artist Unknown, *Venus de Milo*, Between 130 and 100 BC. Pg. 33



Figure 1.9 Yinka Shonibare, *Message in a Bottle*, 2010. Pg. 35



Figure 1.10 Yinka Shonibare, *Message in a Bottle*, 2010. Pg. 35



Figure 1.11 Ingar Dragset and Michael Elmgreen, *Powerless Structures* Fig. 101, 2012. Pg. 36

## Chapter 1

### Away

*Interlinked with one another, then, the census, the map and the museum illuminate the late colonial state's style of thinking about its domain. The 'warp' of this thinking was a totalizing classificatory grid, which could be applied with endless flexibility to anything under the state's real or contemplated control: people, regions, religions, languages, products, monuments, and so forth. The effect of the grid was always to be able to say of anything that it was this, not that; it belonged here, not there. It was bounded, determined, and therefore – in principle – countable. (The comic classificatory and subclassificatory census boxes entitled 'Other' concealed all real-life anomalies by a splendid bureaucratic trompe l'oeil). The 'weft' was what one could call serialization: the assumption that the world was made up of replicable plurals. – Benedict Anderson on the invention of national identity.<sup>10</sup>*

*So much has been written and said about Marc Quinn's statue of me in Trafalgar Square and I won't repeat it here. It's a controversial piece, but all I ask is that you go and see it - and then make up your mind.<sup>11</sup> – Alison Lapper*

In 2005, the artist Marc Quinn unveiled his statue entitled *Alison Lapper Pregnant* on the Fourth Plinth of Trafalgar Square in London, England. This statue provoked instant controversy in the British media on a range of issues including a radical questioning of what

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<sup>10</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso: London, 1983), 184.

<sup>11</sup> Alison Lapper, Statue, 16 July 2010, <http://www.alisonlapper.com>.

constitutes appropriate public art. Trafalgar Square is a place dense with cultural inscriptions about Britain's imperial past and its legacies in the present. In 1999, the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) conceived the Fourth Plinth Project, as a succession of works commissioned from three contemporary artists.<sup>12</sup> Subsequently, the new Greater London Authority decided to continue the RSA's 1999 project at eighteen-month intervals with commissions from leading national and international artists.<sup>13</sup> The constant renewal of the Fourth Plinth Project has permitted an open-ended, expansive and ongoing interrogation of the concept of the nation-state.

Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in the West, public monuments, parks and art have been constructed to remind citizens and visitors of the power and status of the nation-state. There is always controversy when it comes time to choose the function and design of a public space. Not everyone can agree on what is aesthetically pleasing and what is best suited for a specific site, and once a site has been either officially or unofficially claimed for a purpose or to honour an event or person, any change in either its function or design will be contested. When Marc Quinn's statue, *Alison Lapper Pregnant* was installed it generated lively debates about what and who can constitute national bravery and strength. Public debate about the significance of Trafalgar Square and just whose national history it represents has gathered momentum with each new commission.

Trafalgar Square is named after a British naval victory, the Battle of Trafalgar that was won on October 21, 1805.<sup>14</sup> In this battle, Britain defeated the French Navy and the Spanish Navy. The battle was the decisive British victory of the Napoleonic wars (1803-1815). The public

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<sup>12</sup> Alastair Sooke, "Art versus the pigeons," *The Daily Telegraph* 3 November 3 2007, 10 May 2010. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/3669005/Art-versus-the-pigeons.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Rodney Mace, *Trafalgar Square: Emblem of Empire* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976) 50.



square of Trafalgar commemorates the battle's hero, Horatio Nelson,<sup>15</sup> the commanding officer whose victory over Napoleon Bonaparte's fleet established British naval supremacy.<sup>16</sup> Horatio Nelson was an unlikely hero. Throughout his lifetime he endured many illnesses and injuries including blindness in one eye and the amputation of most of his right arm. Yet Nelson is considered to be one of Britain's greatest war heroes. Nelson died due to enemy fire moments before he and his troops won the Battle of Trafalgar. The French outnumbered Nelson and his men but the British prevailed against great odds during the battle.

In 1805, as news of the great victory reached Britain, Nelson was celebrated as a national hero who "received the reward of Victory and the stroke of Death at the same moment."<sup>17</sup> But it was not until the late 1830's, after Nelson had been dead for nearly thirty-five years, that his memorial project generated enough interest to raise the necessary funds. *Nelson's Column* was eventually erected and completed with William Railton's design, between 1840 and 1843.<sup>18</sup> The Nelson Memorial was intended to be a display of victory and strength (fig. 1.1<sup>19</sup>), a monument to Nelson's achievements in battle that provided a template of heroism for British citizens to emulate. On the subject of "the monument," the social geographer Malcolm Miles, notes:

Monuments are produced within a dominant framework of values, as elements in the construction of a national history....they suppose at least partial consensus of values, without which their narrative

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<sup>15</sup> The Nelson memorial concept was in the works for many years before it came to fruition. Trafalgar Square, as it stands today, had been the possible site for naval monuments and the time had come to remind the Brits about their heroes. A growing economic crisis, the Chartist movement and unions within the trades were too much for the government to control. With the stone renderings of fallen heroes the people of Britain could remember the country's triumphs over Jacobinism. The design was chosen with two things in mind: aesthetics and "to honour the departed and encourage those who are entering the same career.

Rodney Mace

<sup>16</sup> Roy Adkins, *Trafalgar: The Biography of a Battle* (London: Little Brown, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> Rodney Mace, *Trafalgar Square: Emblem of Empire* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976) 55.

<sup>18</sup> "The Selected Design for the Nelson Testimonial," *The Art Union* 1: 100. (1839): 100.

<sup>19</sup> William Railton, *Nelson's Column*, 1839-1843, Trafalgar Square, London, 12 July 2012 <http://www.victorianweb.org/sculpture/baily/2.html>.

could not be recognized. Monuments have portrayed political stability and stasis historically, rather than reflecting social change. Monuments are versions and visual mediations of history, specifically ones constructed by those in power. Monuments often refer specifically to acts that have enforced that power, such as wars, conquest, conversion, colonialism, and violence, and therefore monuments legitimize power and enforce that power visually.<sup>20</sup>

The beginning of the nineteenth century saw a shift in art patronage from the aristocracy to the bourgeoisie. Although the idea of public monuments was new to the modern bourgeoisie they rapidly began to erect memorials to honour a privileged few. Before the addition of mainstream media, sculptures were an important vehicle for public messages and memory. Sculptures of political leaders and heroes cast in bronze were erected in public squares and in front of public buildings such as city halls. In Trafalgar Square, The Fourth Plinth Project embodies this official genre of public memorial sculpture – its stakes, its repertoire of characters, and its limited vision of who the exemplary citizen might be.

The French Revolution and the wars Britain declared on Napoleon (1793 to 1815) resulted in the loss of both men and money. These losses were only defensible if the purpose of the conflict was to be achieved: namely expansion and control of trade throughout the globe.<sup>21</sup> The ruling class was grateful to Nelson for saving their reputation. The Battle of Trafalgar established Britain as the number one sea power in Europe.<sup>22</sup> For the remainder of the century many nations had their economies and cultures pillaged to keep the British in business.<sup>23</sup> Memorials would become an object of public display financed by the government for the direct

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<sup>20</sup> Malcolm Miles, The Ambivalence of Public Squares, 12 July 2012  
<http://www.malcolmmiles.org.uk/AmbivalencePublicSquare.html>.

<sup>21</sup> Rodney Mace, *Trafalgar Square: Emblem of Empire* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976) 49.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.



pedagogic and didactic purpose of inscribing and re-inscribing the script of Empire in public sphere.

The permanent monuments on display in Trafalgar Square commemorate colonial conquest and the economic and military supremacy of the British Empire. Nelson's monument is placed in the centre of Trafalgar Square (fig. 1.2 <sup>24</sup>), at the heart of the metropolitan capital of London, England. This site, visited by fifteen million tourists a year, has been described metaphorically as London's front room.<sup>25</sup> Each corner of Trafalgar Square holds a plinth and three of them are inhabited by permanent equestrian statues of military heroes: King George IV; Sir Henry Havelock; and Sir Charles James Napier (a military man from the 19<sup>th</sup> century).<sup>26</sup> The fourth plinth was originally intended to hold a fourth equestrian statue, of William IV, when it was built in 1841, but remained empty due to insufficient funds at the time.<sup>27</sup> The plinth stayed vacant because it could not be decided whose monument it should support (fig. 1.3 <sup>28</sup>).

On September 15<sup>th</sup> 2005, Marc Quinn unveiled his sculpture *Alison Lapper Pregnant* on the fourth plinth of Trafalgar Square: it was to occupy the space for eighteen months (fig. 1.4 <sup>29</sup>).<sup>30</sup> His marble nude torso-bust of *Alison Lapper Pregnant* was 3.6 metres tall and weighed 12 tons.<sup>31</sup> The sculpture was carved from Carrara marble, a similar material used in many Italian Renaissance masterpieces, including Michelangelo's *David* (fig. 1.5 <sup>32</sup>). Alison Lapper is an

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<sup>24</sup> *Trafalgar Square*, London, England. 12 July 2012, <http://e2gb21985.wordpress.com/page/3/>.

<sup>25</sup> Rodney Mace, *Trafalgar Square: Emblem of Empire* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976) 15.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> David Doyle, "Arthur's design proves eye-catching," *Ealing Times* 18 June 2007, 3 March 2012. <http://www.ealingtimes.co.uk/news/1479441.0/>.

<sup>28</sup> Sean Smith/Guardian (photo credit) *The Fourth Plinth*, 10 February 2009, Trafalgar Square, London, 2 July 2012 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/gallery/2009/feb/10/art>.

<sup>29</sup> Marc Quinn, Dan Chung/Guardian (photo credit), *Alison Lapper Pregnant*, 2005, Trafalgar Square, London, 13 July 2012 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2007/may/17/statueoflimitations>.

<sup>30</sup> Rachel Cooke, "Bold, brave, beautiful," *The Observer* 18 September 2008, 13 July 2012. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2005/sep/18/art>.

<sup>31</sup> Marc Quinn, *The Fourth Plinth* (London: steidlMACK, 2006).

<sup>32</sup> Michelangelo, *David*, 1501-1504, Accademia Gallery, Florence, 30 July 2012 <http://www.cambridgeblog.org/2009/10/wallace-michelangelo-3/>.

artist who was born with no arms and shortened, flipper-like legs due to a medical condition called phocomelia.<sup>33</sup> Lapper is depicted in her third trimester of pregnancy. As the work's reception in the media underlined, *Alison Lapper Pregnant*, disrupted the imperial, masculine, and colonial space of Trafalgar Square, a place in which the ideal citizen is represented as a strong and victorious male hero.

The statue, *Alison Lapper Pregnant* has generated public debate around several issues: patriarchy, femininity, disability and sexuality. This depiction of a nude and pregnant female body disrupted a public space that once stood for white, imperialist, capitalist and patriarchal values. In the press, Quinn was accused of creating shock at the expense of a pregnant and disabled woman. This is not true, however as Lapper and Quinn are friends, and Lapper is an artist herself, who volunteered for the project. Indeed, many reviews referred to the piece as a collaboration between the two artists when it was on display in Trafalgar Square. While others, felt that the contemporary sculpture did not complement and belong to the aesthetics of the square's monuments all of which celebrated male victory and domination.

Michel Foucault discusses the concept of discourse in his writings on power, knowledge and agency, he notes that discourse allows speakers, hearers, writers, readers and in this case, artists and viewers to come to an understanding about themselves and their relationship to each other.<sup>34</sup> The concept of discourse is important because it brings "power and knowledge together."<sup>35</sup> While those who have the power may have initial control of "what is known and the way it is known,"<sup>36</sup> it is important to remember as the critical reception of Quinn's sculpture in Trafalgar Square demonstrates, any public communication is open to contestation.

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<sup>33</sup> Alison Lapper, Biography, 16 July 2010, <http://www.alisonlapper.com/biog/>.

<sup>34</sup> Bill Ashcoft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds., *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2000) 70.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 72.

Artists such as Quinn, who represent bodies that have gone unspoken of bring these bodies into public discourse, hereby contesting the power structures that would exclude them. In his work, Foucault describes an idea called “heterotopia,” which divides the world into a certain order, or classes that designate similarities and differences.<sup>37</sup> It is through this division that public space is “sexed” and “gendered”.<sup>38</sup> Ann Millett from *Disabilities Studies Quarterly* expands on this theory:

Public space and its monuments have been gendered male and raced white traditionally, and public space is largely ableist in attitude, not to mention accessibility (or lack thereof). Public art, when the most effective, creates dialogues about the role of art in society and whom is included and excluded in the notion of the "public."<sup>39</sup>

Trafalgar Square has been sexed, gendered, classed and raced by years of public memory work that has focused only on the privileged, white, male hero. Lapper’s feminine, pregnant body created a stark contrast against the battling and often phallic permanent sculptures of this memorial square.

Other observers dismissed the sculpture as the artist’s political agenda. Dismissing the statue as simply the artist’s message allows people to ignore the difficult subject matter that the work presents. Ann Millett explains:

*Alison Lapper Pregnant* significantly responds to, as well as transforms the history of its particular space and interacts with the populations who inhabit that space. Rather than displaying trite political correctness or simple shock value, as much of its criticism wages, the work plays monumental roles in the histories of both disability representation and art. As a public spectacle, it recycles, and contemporizes, the representation of disability as both heroic and freakish. The sculpture in the

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<sup>37</sup> Elspeth Probyn, *Outside Belongings* (New York & London: Routledge, 1996) 9.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>39</sup> Ann Millett, “Sculpting Body Ideals: *Alison Lapper Pregnant* and the Public Display of Disability,” *Disability Studies Quarterly* 28.3 (2008), 12 July 2012 <http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/122/122>.

round poignantly brings into high relief contrasting perceptions and representations of disabled bodies and therefore forges important public debates.<sup>40</sup>

Not only are Quinn and Lapper presenting an important discussion of disability but they are also helping to shift the norms of heroism.

In looking at the statues of Lapper and Nelson in Trafalgar Square, the viewer is presented with some immediately obvious parallels. The comparisons Lapper has to Nelson were not lost to Quinn: bravery, conquering disability and overcoming a world of obstacles were a part of his intentions when creating this sculpture for Trafalgar Square (fig. 1.6<sup>41</sup> fig. 1.7<sup>42</sup>).<sup>43</sup> Lapper's body as represented in Trafalgar Square helps to shift public discourse on what constitutes strength, thus redefining the concept of able-bodied. Lapper's monument is presented as pregnant, heroic and beautiful alongside those of national heroes recognizable to all British residents. Comparing Lapper to Nelson did create social anxiety because Nelson and his military conquests have become a symbol for English nationalism as the Nelson bicentennial demonstrated in 2005.<sup>44</sup> Lapper's body is presented as a new symbol of strength.

Pregnancy in the European Victorian era, the time in which the original sculptures in Trafalgar Square were made, was seen as a state of fragility.<sup>45</sup> Pregnant women were considered to be hysterical and were to be hidden away from the public eye. Foucault discusses the "sexing" and "gendering" of space and uses the example of the honeymoon,

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> William Railton, Linda Nyland/Guardian (photo credit), *Nelson's Column*, 1839-1843, Trafalgar Square, London, 30 July 2012 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/oct/18/nelsons-column-model-auction>.

<sup>42</sup> Marc Quinn, *Alison Lapper Pregnant*, 2005, Trafalgar Square, London, July 2012 <http://ablersite.org/2011/05/24/alison-lapper-pregnant/>.

<sup>43</sup> Marc Quinn, *The Fourth Plinth* (London: steidlMACK, 2006).

<sup>44</sup> 'England Expects': *Nelson as a symbol of local and national identity within the museum*, Sheila Watson, November 2006, University of Leicester, 3 June 2013 <https://lra.le.ac.uk/handle/2381/7357>.

<sup>45</sup> *Hysteria and the Body*, Exhibit at Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon, SK, February 2009.

where women were taken to “non-places” to be deflowered.<sup>46</sup> This example can be related to the act of pregnant women being hidden from public sight because pregnancy was seen as a female condition that was out-of-place in a society designated for patriarchy. Pregnancy was not heroic; it was a female’s duty to their church, country and husband. All too often today pregnancy is thought of in the same way; it is in a female’s nature to rear children and hormones control a woman during any part of her reproductive cycle.

Society believes women’s bodies are open for public criticism and concern while pregnant, even more so than usual. Public concern focuses on whether pregnant women are doing everything in their power to have healthy pregnancies and produce healthy children. Theorist Rosalyn Diprose points out that a pregnant woman’s body is under constant scrutiny and surveillance.<sup>47</sup> Sociologist, Carol Thomas, argues that women with disabilities are even more vulnerable to scrutiny during pregnancy because of the assumed health risks and inabilities of the woman.<sup>48</sup> Ann Millett discusses specific public criticisms in regards to Lapper’s pregnancy:

Mainstream discourses that breed women for motherhood suggest that a productive female member of the society is a *reproductive* one, specifically within the institution of marriage. Far from glorifying a nuclear family, Lapper was born to a single, working class mother and is herself an unmarried mother, who has benefited from public programs for disabled artists. Many may view Lapper's choices amoral and her subsistence as a public burden, therefore she hardly acts in the legacy of national heroes.<sup>49</sup>

Many people worry that mothers with disabilities will produce more citizens with disabilities creating more of a burden for the nation-state or the public.

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<sup>46</sup> Elspeth Probyn, *Outside Belongings* (New York & London: Routledge, 1996) 9.

<sup>47</sup> Rosalyn Diprose, *Corporeal generosity: On giving with Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty, and Levinas*. (London: SUNY, 2002).

<sup>48</sup> Carol Thomas, “The baby and the bath water: Disabled women and motherhood in social context,” *Maternal theory, Essential readings*, ed. A. O’Reilly (Toronto: Demeter Press, 2007) 500-19.

<sup>49</sup> Ann Millett, “Sculpting Body Ideals: *Alison Lapper Pregnant* and the Public Display of Disability,” *Disability Studies Quarterly* 28.3 (2008), 12 July 2012 <http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/122/122>.

Many criticized Quinn for deliberately presenting art for shock value at the expense of Lapper's disability. The artist himself disagrees and says his inspiration came from the fact that there was "*no positive representation of disability in the history of public art.*"<sup>50</sup> What is interesting is that an audience is shocked by seeing a nude woman sculpted in stone when the history of art has seen countless nude women, including the *Venus de Milo* (fig. 1.8 <sup>51</sup>) which has strikingly similar features as Lapper. Ann Millett quotes Waldemar Januszczak from the *Sunday Times* who subversively makes the connection between Quinn's work and the ancient work of the Greeks:

By carving Allison Lapper out of pristine marble, Quinn is *taking on* the Greeks; he is *disputing* with Phidias, with Michelangelo, with Sir Joshua Reynolds, with every authoritarian with imagination that has ever insisted upon a standard shape for the human in art; he is contradicting 2,000 years of creative *misrepresentation* of what being human means; and he is giving Allison Lapper the same amount of artistic attention that Canova gave the Empress Josephine. As if that were not enough, Quinn is also cheekily rhyming his sculptures with the broken remnants of classical art — the armless Venus, the legless Apollo — that are the staple diet of all collections of the antique. These are serious achievements.<sup>52</sup>

The difference is that Lapper was born disabled rather than her limbs being edited later in life, like in the case of Nelson. Disabled bodies are rarely represented in art and monuments, feeding the stigma that those with disabilities have limitations and are not capable of heroic

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<sup>50</sup> Louise Jury, "New hero takes seat in Trafalgar Square...but what do artists and the public think?," *The Independent*, 16 September 2005, 15 September 2011. <http://www.independent.ie/world-news/europe/new-hero-takes-seat-in-traffic-square-but-what-do-artists-and-the-public-think-25966542.html>.

<sup>51</sup> Artist unknown, *Venus de Milo*, 130-100 BC, Louvre Museum, Paris, 30 July 2012 [http://www.seven-pride.com/en/news/famous\\_classical\\_sculptures\\_of\\_the\\_world](http://www.seven-pride.com/en/news/famous_classical_sculptures_of_the_world).

<sup>52</sup> Ann Millett, "Sculpting Body Ideals: *Alison Lapper Pregnant* and the Public Display of Disability," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 28.3 (2008), 12 July 2012 <http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/122/122>.

feats or commemoration. In *Disability Studies Quarterly*, Ann Millett comments on the importance that representing disability has:

The work [*Alison Lapper Pregnant*] has been highly criticized for capitalizing on the shock value of disability, as well as lauded for its progressive social values. *Alison Lapper Pregnant* and the controversy surrounding it showcase disability issues at the forefront of current debates in contemporary art.<sup>53</sup>

Alison Lapper's body disrupted white, capitalist, imperial, patriarchal and seemingly able-bodied space and thrust conversations about the representation of disability in public site into the forefront. The social anxiety aroused by Marc Quinn's *Alison Lapper Pregnant* can be mapped back to Britain's history of colonial conquest, imperialism and patriarchy. The connections Marc Quinn makes by completing Trafalgar's fourth plinth with *Alison Lapper Pregnant*, and placing it next to memorials of conquests and military victories introduces audiences to new ideas of heroism.

The critical reception of public art projects reveals a lot about cultural anxiety. The positive reviews of *Alison Lapper Pregnant* indicate a changing public opinion that favours the inclusion and acceptance of the disabled and feminine body in an imperial, male dominated space. By re-valuing and re-signifying femininity and disability in public sculpture and by interrogating the notion of the heroic citizen, Quinn's sculpture of Lapper contributes to the ongoing work of re-figuring the national imaginary.

Many artists have since used the Fourth Plinth as a site to represent other bodies that are often ignored within hegemonic narratives of national identity. Yinka Shonibare, for example, is a Nigerian born, British artist who was invited to show his work on the Fourth Plinth. His

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

sculpture, *Message in a Bottle*, stood on the plinth from May 2010 to January 2012 (fig. 1.9<sup>54</sup>).<sup>55</sup> The piece was a replica of Nelson's ship, *HMS Victory*, which is displayed in a giant glass bottle. As Shonibare notes, his work was intended to celebrate London's "immense ethnic wealth."<sup>56</sup>

The ships' sails (fig. 1.10<sup>57</sup>) made from batik fabric, are a trademark of Shonibare's work representing a complicated imperial history of economic and cultural trade. Batik fabric was inspired by Indonesian prints and was mass produced by the Dutch in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>58</sup> The fabric was not well received by the Dutch and was shipped to Africa, where it became very popular.<sup>59</sup> In Shonibare's work, this fabric has become a metaphor for empire and colonialism. In *Message in a Bottle*, Shonibare uses the fabric to represent Nelson's defeat of Napoleon and, Britain's victory in gaining control of the seas, and establishing the British empire as a super power. Shonibare explains the that piece, "reflected specifically on the relationship between the birth of the British Empire and Britain's present-day multicultural context."<sup>60</sup>

Shonibare's *Message in a Bottle* in Trafalgar Square opens up this public space to contemporary debates about "The Multi-cultural Question" as Stuart Hall puts it. This topic

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<sup>54</sup> Yinka Shonibare, *Message in a Bottle*, 2010, Trafalgar Square, London, 30 July 2012

<http://www.treehugger.com/culture/message-in-a-bottle-fourth-plinth-celebrates-british-history.html>.

<sup>55</sup> Bonnie Alter, "Message in a Bottle: Fourth Plinth Celebrates British History," *Treehugger: A Discovery Company*, 24 June 2010, 30 July 2012. <http://www.treehugger.com/culture/message-in-a-bottle-fourth-plinth-celebrates-british-history.html>.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Yinka Shonibare, Katherine Finerty (photo credit), *Message in a Bottle*, 2010, Trafalgar Square, London, 30 July 2012 <http://www.studiomuseum.org/studio-blog/checkout/elsewhere/yinka-shonibare-s-message-in-bottle-hybrid-citizen-ship>.

<sup>58</sup> Katherine Finerty, rev. of *Message in a Bottle*, by Yinka Shonibare, "Yinka Shonibare's Message in a Bottle: Hybrid Citizen-Ship," *Studio Museum Harlem*, 13 February 2012, 2 August 2012 <http://www.studiomuseum.org/studio-blog/checkout/elsewhere/yinka-shonibare-s-message-in-bottle-hybrid-citizen-ship>.

<sup>59</sup> Bonnie Alter, "Message in a Bottle: Fourth Plinth Celebrates British History," *Treehugger: A Discovery Company*, 24 June 2010, 29 July 2012. <http://www.treehugger.com/culture/message-in-a-bottle-fourth-plinth-celebrates-british-history.html>.

<sup>60</sup> Stephen Adams, "Lord Nelson reunited with his ship – in a bottle," *The Telegraph* 24 May 2010, 29 July 2012. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-news/7759679/Lord-Nelson-reunited-with-his-ship-in-a-bottle.html>.



was not a central feature in the discourse surrounding Trafalgar's public art, until Shonibare's work disrupted and unsettled its white space with an image signifying the heterogeneity and pluralism of the contemporary nation.

Finally, during the London Summer Olympics of 2012, The Fourth Plinth Project unveiled yet another sculpture entitled *Powerless Structures, Fig. 101* by the Scandinavian artists Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset is a two-toned bronze sculpture of a boy riding a rocking horse, an equestrian statue in it's own right (fig. 1.11 <sup>61</sup>). In the press, this statue was, for the most part, described as "completely unthreatening and adorable creature."<sup>62</sup> The artist, Michael Elmgreen explains: "While the other statues in the square celebrate power, this work celebrates growing up. He is a 'more sensitive and fragile creature looking to the future'."<sup>63</sup> A child on a rocking horse is an interesting choice for the Olympic year, one intended to inspire, considerations of not only the younger generation but also the generations to come. In the next chapter entitled "Home," the Indigenous activist Cindy Blackstock also uses the figure of the child, but this time it is to draw attention to the injustices that face First Nations children in Canada.

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<sup>61</sup> Ingar Dragset and Michael Elmgreen, *Powerless Structure fig 101*, 2012, Trafalgar Square, London, 8 August 2012 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2012/feb/23/sensitive-fragile-traffic-square-fourth-plinth>.

<sup>62</sup> Mark Brown, "'Sensitive and fragile creature' unveiled on Trafalgar Square's fourth plinth," *The Guardian* 23 February 2012, 8 August 2012. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2012/feb/23/sensitive-fragile-traffic-square-fourth-plinth>.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter 2 Photo Essay



Figure 2.1 Vancouver 2010 Olympic Mascots. Pg. 56



Figure 2.2 Aboriginal Dancers at the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Opening Ceremonies. Pg. 56



Figure 2.3 Jeff Vinnick (emblem designer), *Vancouver 2010 Emblem*, 2010. Pg. 57



Figure 2.4 Aboriginal Dancers at the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Opening Ceremonies. Pg. 58



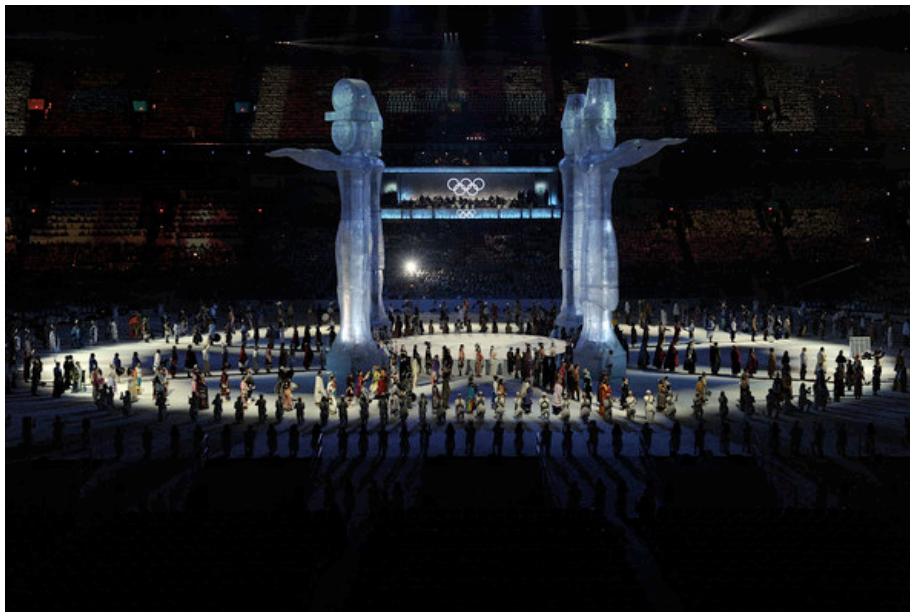


Figure 2.5 Opening Ceremonies of the Vancouver 2010 Olympics. Pg. 58



Figure 2.6 Eve Harlow (photo credit), *HBC Display Window*, 2010. Pg. 60



# Blood On Your Hands:



**Are you wearing HBC's history of colonialism?**

Figure 2.7 Alex Hundert, *Blood On Your Hands*, 2010. Pg. 60

Homelessness, Ecological Destruction, Corporate Invasion of Native Lands, Huge Profits for Corporations, Massive Public Debt, Increased Police Repression & Surveillance...

*Let's Stand Together & Show the World There is:*

# NO TIME for the Olympics!



## Protest Against Olympic 'Countdown Clock'

On Feb. 12, 2007, VANOC (Vancouver Olympic Organizing Committee) Will Begin A 3-Year 'Countdown Clock' to the 2010 Winter Olympics

Already, 2010 has caused:

**Homelessness & Poverty** (100's evicted as low-income hotels close for tourism)

**Environmental Destruction** (logging & blasting the Earth for Hwy. expansion, new roads, & facilities for events)

**Imprisonment of Squamish Elder**, (in January, 2007, Harriet Nahanee-- in her '70s-- was sentenced to 14 days in jail for protesting highway expansion at Eagle Ridge in N. Vancouver, May 2006).

**Monday, Feb. 12, 2007**

**@ 12 Noon, Vancouver Art Gallery**

Speakers & Drummers from Secwepemc, St'at'imc & Lil'wat, Native Youth Movement, Anti-Poverty Committee, No One Is Illegal, DERA, Wild Earth, SF-PIRG, and Others.  
Bring Drums & Noise-makers.

**Organized by: Anti-Olympic Coalition**

Figure 2.8 *No Time for the Olympics*, 2007. Pg. 60



Figure 2.9 Anti-Olympic Torch Light Parade, 2009. Pg. 61





Figure 2.10 Jeff Vinnick (emblem designer), *Vancouver 2010 Emblem*, 2010. Pg. 62

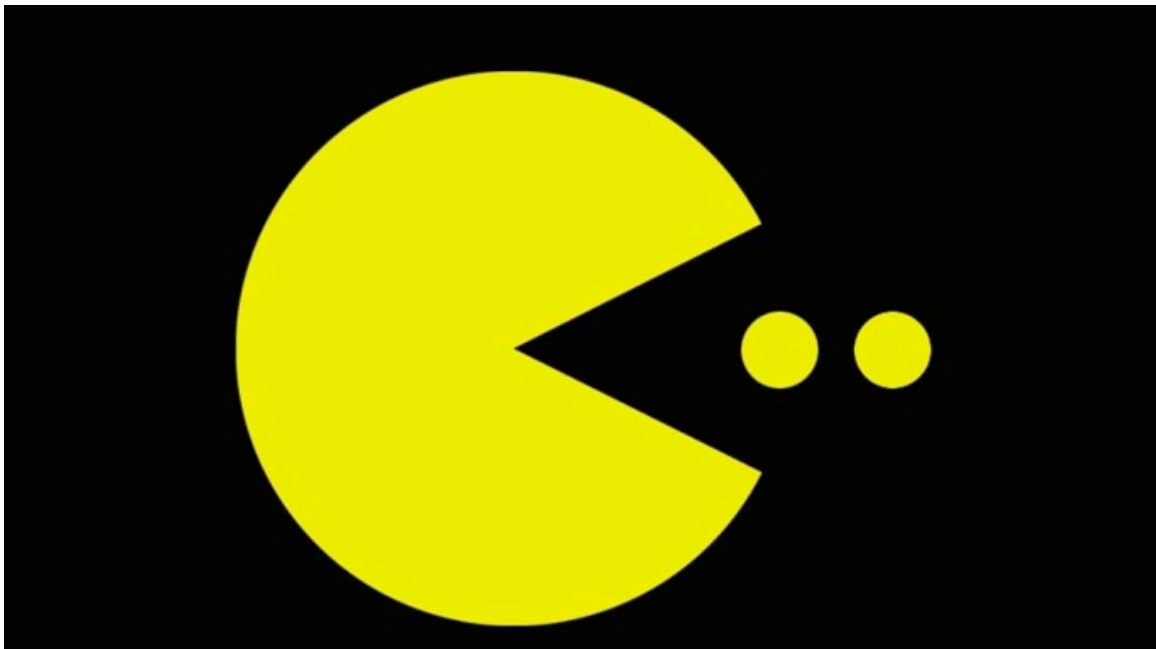


Figure 2.11 Pac Man. Pg. 63





Figure 2.12 Shannen Koostachin speaking at the *National Day of Action* in Ottawa, 2008. Pg. 65



Figure 2.13 Attawapiskat grade 8 classroom. Pg. 65



Figure 2.14 Attawapiskat school door. Pg. 65

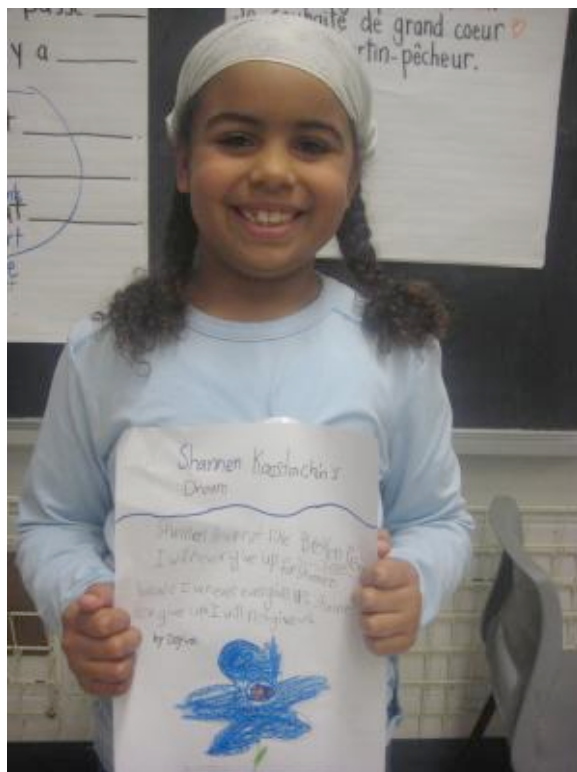


Figure 2.15 Letters from school children. Pg. 66



Figure 2.16 North Shore Micmac Distract FASD Youth Forum, 2011. Pg. 67



Figure 2.17 Letters from school children. Pg. 67



Figure 2.18 Shannen's Dream Day of Action in Ottawa, April 27, 2011. Pg. 67





Figure 2.19 Amnesty International, Stolen Sisters. Pg. 73



Figure 2.20 Lori Blondeau and Dana Claxton, *Redskin Imaginary*, 2010. Pg. 76



Figure 2.21 Lori Blondeau and Dana Claxton, *Redskin Imaginary*, 2010. Pg. 76



Figure 2.22 Lori Blondeau and Dana Claxton, *Redskin Imaginary*, 2010. Pg. 77



2.23 Lori Blondeau, *Lonely Surfer Squaw*, 1997. Pg. 77





Figure 2.24 Rebecca Belmore, *Vigil*, 2002. Pg. 79



Figure 2.25 Rebecca Belmore, *Vigil*, 2002. Pg. 79





Figure 2.26 Rebecca Belmore, *Vigil*, 2002. Pg. 79

## Chapter 2

### Home

*It is important to honour the missing and murdered women. It is unacceptable to marginalize these women. The Creator did not create garbage. He created beauty.* – Elder Dan Smoke, closing a healing ceremony for his sister-in-law, Deborah Anne Sloss, who died in Toronto on August 24<sup>th</sup> 1997, under suspicious circumstances.<sup>64</sup>

*What we are today has been inspired as much by four centuries of life with the indigenous civilizations as by four centuries of immigration. Perhaps more. Today we are the outcome of that experience.*<sup>65</sup> – John Ralston Saul

*Multiculturalism is often used in Canada as a tool of control. It is often described as if settler nationality is a fait accompli, needing only a myth of unity into which newcomers can assimilate with ease. As often as not, events and actions that rub against the grain of this forceful idea are dismissed in a sort of syllogistic logic of belonging: Canada is not racist, and therefore racist actions that occur in Canada are, by definition, anomalous rather than systemic. This has been a powerful politics over the years and one against which numerous artists, writers, politicians, lawyers, and others have strongly reacted.*<sup>66</sup> – Kirsty Robertson and J. Keri Cronin

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<sup>64</sup> *Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Discrimination and Violence Against Indigenous Women in Canada*, 2004, Amnesty International Report, 3 September 2009 <http://www.amnesty.ca/our-work/issues/indigenous-peoples/no-more-stolen-sisters>.

<sup>65</sup> John Ralston Saul, *A Fair Country: Telling Truths About Canada* (Toronto: Penguin Group, 2009) 1.

<sup>66</sup> Kirsty Robertson and J. Keri Cronin, "Crises of Representation: Multiculturalism, Minquon Panchyat, and the 'The Lands Within Me,'" *Imagining Resistance: Visual Culture and Activism in Canada*, ed. Kirsty Robertson and J. Keri Cronin (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011) 145.

*We're so self-effacing as Canadians that we sometimes forget the assets we do have that other people see. ... We are one of the most stable regimes in history. ... We also have no history of colonialism. So we have all of the things that many people admire about the great powers but none of the things that threaten or bother them. ... Canada is big enough to make a difference but not big enough to threaten anybody. And that is a huge asset if it's properly used.*<sup>67</sup>

- Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Sept. 25, 2009 G20 Summit

## **Part 1 - Is this our Canada?**

Mainstream representations of the collective identity of a nation not only represent what a society or country wishes to acknowledge and celebrate but in their silences they also reveal what a particular society wishes to forget, erase or disfigure. Overlooking such difficult knowledge as the histories of a colonial past, and omitting the past and present marginalization of the Other, allows the nation state to create and maintain a pleasant and consoling collective identity. Canada is not exempt from this process of white washing. For instance, the underfunding of Aboriginal communities in Canada has resulted in more First Nations children being in the welfare system than at the height of the residential school era.<sup>68</sup> This is a national crime. The failure to find, protect and acknowledge the over 500 women<sup>69</sup> that have been stolen is another crime that disrupts Canada's national imaginary as a fair and just society.

In this chapter, I will focus on three case-studies in which art and visual culture has been utilized to bear witness to the continuing marginalization of Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

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<sup>67</sup> Aaron Wherry, "What he was talking about when he talked about colonialism," *Maclean's* October 2009, 12 September 2010 <http://www2.macleans.ca/2009/10/01/what-he-was-talking-about-when-he-talked-about-colonialism/>.

<sup>68</sup> Cindy Blackstock, "i am a witness," Arts Building, U of Saskatchewan, November 2011.

<sup>69</sup> *Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Discrimination and Violence Against Indigenous Women in Canada*, 2004, Amnesty International Report, 3 September 2009 <http://www.amnesty.ca/our-work/issues/indigenous-peoples/no-more-stolen-sisters>.

First, I will examine the 2010 Vancouver Olympics: the street protests as well as the Aboriginal presence during the opening-ceremony celebrations and how both of these public performances were used as sites of testimony. Second, I will study the Aboriginal activist, Cindy Blackstock's online campaign entitled, *i am a witness*, in which she uses text and visual media to highlight the Canadian government's ongoing oppression of Aboriginal communities of Canada through discriminatory educational policies that fail to provide adequate funding for schools on reserves. Third, I will investigate Amnesty International's report, *Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Discrimination and Violence Against Indigenous Women in Canada* (Stolen Sisters, 2004, 2009), which discusses the missing and stolen Aboriginal women of Canada. The report outlines the failure of law enforcement agencies, the media, and wider society to even acknowledge what is going on and to take actions to ensure it never happens again. In all of these case studies, I will pay attention to Aboriginal voices and perspectives. As a historian of visual culture, I am interested in how visual imagery has been used to bear witness to the issues these case studies and campaigns highlight.

In my research for this chapter I have consulted a critical archive of testimony, including the online campaigns of activist Cindy Blackstock, the report by the Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples (1996), and Amnesty International's Stolen Sisters (2009) reports. I have also studied the ideas of Canadian cultural critic, John Ralston Saul, who discusses the nation's current state of colonialism, (*A Fair Country*, 2008); the testimony of several Aboriginal artists who talk back to colonialism; and media archives that comment on these issues, which helps me think through such issues as the politics of representation, alterity, and colonial violence (both discursive and material) in Canada.

I was fortunate enough to attend the 2010 Vancouver Olympics. I arrived during the second week and by then the street riots performed by the Black Bloc had been stopped and the streets had been cleaned up. Every other person wore Hudson Bay Company red mittens with embroidered Olympic rings and it was difficult not to get swept up in the excitement of the games (fig. 2.1 <sup>70</sup>). Robson Square, the heart of downtown Vancouver, boasted a zip-line,<sup>71</sup> entertainment at all hours, TV cameras and personalities, and energized crowds. In many ways, the Olympic Games are exciting spectacles. They exist in a moment when individuals representing nations from across the world take part in diplomatic competition. However, in 2010, in that same moment, a spotlight was shone on Canada. A first-world country, often overshadowed by the Empire to the south, we do not often get this amount of media attention. I went purely as a fan but something about the representation of Aboriginal people during the opening ceremonies and the violent protests outside the official Games arena made me think beyond the events and official discourses of sports.

The representation of Aboriginal people during the 2010 Vancouver Olympics was dictated by an official discourse of a sanitized business discourse of multi-culturalism. In the 2010 Vancouver Olympics opening ceremonies, Canada was represented in the media as a country that fully embraces the culture and traditions of the Aboriginal people of Canada. The presence of Aboriginal delegates, in their regalia, performing traditional dance, represented Canada as an egalitarian, equal-opportunities anti-colonial society (fig. 2.2 <sup>72</sup>). What was missing from this

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<sup>70</sup> Natasha Gervis (photo credit), *Mascots and Red Mitten Souvenirs*, Vancouver, 2010, 12 July 2012 <http://govancouver.about.com/od/2010vancouverolympics/ig/2010-VANCOUVER-OLYMPICS/Mascot-and-red-mittens.-1ci.htm>.

<sup>71</sup> A zip-line consists of a pulley suspended on a cable mounted on an incline. It is designed to enable a user propelled by gravity to travel from the top to the bottom of the inclined cable, usually made of stainless steel, by holding on or attaching to the freely moving pulley. Zip-lines come in many forms, most often used as a means of entertainment.

<sup>72</sup> *Dancing Shoes: Native Canadian performers dance during the Opening Ceremony of the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics at BC Place*, Vancouver, 13 February 2010, 9 July 2012

spectacle were the different issues and conversations about colonialism and its legacies that occurred in the streets outside of the stadium. Here, Aboriginal people of British Columbia, Canada and the Americas demonstrated against the infrastructure for the games (highways, hotels, etc)<sup>73</sup> that had been built on sacred lands, and shone a spotlight on how Indigenous claims were still being ignored. These street actions challenged viewers to think critically about the way the Olympics were being marketed. The protests were overshadowed with symbols of the Inuksuit (fig. 2.3 <sup>74</sup>) in an advertising campaign that revealed the capitalist, imperialist, and neo-colonial underpinnings of global corporate capitalism.<sup>75</sup>

The opening ceremony of the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver can be read as a showy display of Canadianna: a spectacle of “multi-culturalism” and of human connection to the land. On the one hand, this ceremony was a spectacle that was designed to build on the mainstream discourses that represent Canada as a “Fair Country.” On the other hand, the presence of Aboriginal Nations from across Canada dressed in regalia appearing in the stadium and on national television made a strong statement about how the country of Canada came into being on Indigenous territories and how the nation state is grounded in and shaped by Aboriginal as well as settle values and worldviews.<sup>76</sup> Aboriginal peoples performed for live and televised

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<http://www.morethanthegames.co.uk/other-sports/138872-live-text-commentary-2010-winter-olympics-vancouver-opening-ceremony?page=0%2C1>.

<sup>73</sup> *Winter Olympics and Aborigines' Rights*, Prof Susurro, 22 January 2010, Like a Whisper: Feminism Critical Race Consciousness, Queer Politics, & Dr. Who Too!?, 5 June 2012 <http://likeawhisper.wordpress.com/2010/01/22/winter-olympics-aborigines-rights/>.

<sup>74</sup> <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2010/02/photogalleries/100212-vancouver-2010-winter-olympics-logo-ilanaaq/>.

<sup>75</sup> Bell Hooks' theory around 'imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy' and its indoctrination in our school system and embeddings in our societies. Bell Hooks urges her students to think about issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, white supremacy, capitalism and imperialism at the same time as they are always interconnected.

<sup>76</sup> John Ralston Saul, *A Fair Country: Telling Truths About Canada* (Toronto: Penguin Group, 2009) 3.

audiences according to province and nation in traditional dress (fig. 2.4 <sup>77</sup>). As noted, Aboriginal presence happened in two sites simultaneously: inside and outside the stadium. In the streets, Aboriginal communities raised issues that are consistently forgotten by the mainstream, including that the Canadian state is built on Aboriginal territory and that Aboriginal civilizations have partnered in building this country. Three totems were raised inside the stadium to welcome the world to Vancouver on behalf of the four Indigenous nations of British Columbia (fig. 2.5 <sup>78</sup>). Watching this show, the casual observer would assume Canada to be a fun-loving country filled with the song, dance and stories of Aboriginal communities.

The opening ceremonies of the Vancouver 2010 Olympics represented the Aboriginal Nations as being at peace with Canada's colonial "past,"<sup>79</sup> embracing the future of their people and traditions. However, as the Royal Commission for Aboriginal People reminds us:

Canada enjoys a reputation as a special place - a place where human rights and dignity are guaranteed, where the rules of liberal democracy are respected, where diversity among peoples is celebrated. But this reputation represents, at best, a half-truth.<sup>80</sup>

It was pleasant and uplifting to see Canada represent itself as being proud and respectful of Aboriginal people. However, missing from the Olympic conversations were the past and present realities of the marginalization, segregation and assimilation of Aboriginal peoples in

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<sup>77</sup> *Aboriginal People of Canada Help to Kick off Olympics*, Vancouver, 12 July 2012, <http://multiculturalcookingnetwork.wordpress.com/2010/02/24/aboriginal-people-of-canada-help-to-kick-off-olympics/>.

<sup>78</sup> *Opening Ceremonies of the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics*, Vancouver, 13 February 2010, 2 July 2012 <http://livenowtravel.wordpress.com/2010/02/13/photo-album-olympics---opening-ceremony-of-the-2010-vancouver-winter-olympics-part-2/>.

<sup>79</sup> Colonialism and the tactics of colonizers still exist in present day Western society; this is often referred to as "Neo-Colonialism."

<sup>80</sup> Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, *Highlights from the Report of the Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples* (Ottawa: Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 1996), 15 September 2011 <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100014597#chp1>.

Canada. Knowledge of this colonial history both interrogates and arouses scrutiny of Canada's façade as a peacekeeping nation.

The organizers did acknowledge the reality of how Aboriginal Nations have shaped the nation-state through the inclusion of Aboriginal presence in the Opening Ceremonies. Yet, many Canadians still refuse to acknowledge this lived complexity of being Canadian as John Ralston Saul writes:

Our anthologies are largely narrow, linguistically defined collections, as if we can't digest the complexity in which we have lived and continue to live. The remarkable Aboriginal sagas and myths are absent, even though they account for many of our greatest texts, our most important poetry, our only origin creation myths.<sup>81</sup>

However, while this seemingly inclusive opening ceremony masked the ongoing legacies of colonialism, it was the visual spectacle of the anti-Olympics protests taking place in the streets outside the Olympic venue that were broadcast on CBC and around the world.

The most apparent unrest during the 2010 Vancouver Olympics were the street riots by the organization Black Bloc, which began during the first week of the games, February 13, 2010. According to CBC news reports this group consisted mostly of anarchists who travel to highly publicized events. The statement issued by the police states:

The demonstration involving a number of anarchists, some of whom dress all in black and employ a tactic called Black Bloc. This included a loosely organized group of thugs from Central Canada known to attach themselves to any cause, travel to any event that attracts media coverage and promote anarchy wherever they go.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> John Ralston Saul, *A Fair Country: Telling Truths About Canada* (Toronto: Penguin Group, 2009) 234.

<sup>82</sup> Mick Sweetman, "We need a mass movement not a black bloc," *Linchpin*, 19 February 2010, 21 May 2012. <http://www.linchpin.ca/English/We-need-mass-movement-not-black-bloc>.



This group smashed windows of businesses that sponsored the games, such as The Hudson Bay Company and the Royal Bank of Canada (fig. 2.6 <sup>83</sup>). However, the protests did not start or end with “Black Bloc,” this was simply the media’s attempts to contain critiques of the protests.

The use of posters helped to get the anti-Olympic message across to a larger audience. Flyers and posters with powerful images and information accompanied the rallies (fig. 2.7 <sup>84</sup>). Visual imagery was an important tool for protesters. The 2010 Vancouver anti-Olympic archives are currently available online as a chronological record of the Olympic protests. Poster art, news clips, blog entries as well as images from newspapers are accessible. The concerns posed by protesters ranged from the size of corporate gain while public debt multiplied; the Games being held on stolen land; media misrepresentation of the local Aboriginal peoples; destruction of land and natural resources; and the enormous public spending on a Olympic spectacle while local people are homeless and hungry (fig. 2.8 <sup>85</sup>).<sup>86</sup> Making this information available through visual imagery allows for the protests to address more citizens.

As early as 2007, anti-Olympic protests were widespread, playing out across multiple venues nationally and internationally. In October 2007, more than 1500 Indigenous people representing communities across this hemisphere held the *Gathering of the Indigenous Peoples of America*, on Yaqui territory in Vicam, Sonora, Mexico.<sup>87</sup> At this event, the Indigenous

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<sup>83</sup> Eve Harlow (photo credit), *The HBC Display Window*, Vancouver, 15 February 2010, 13 July 2012 <http://vancouver.mediacoop.ca/fr/story/2768>.

<sup>84</sup> Alex Hundert, *Blood on your hands: Are you wearing HBC's History of Colonialism?*, 2010, 13 July 2012 <http://alexhundert.wordpress.com/2010/02/13/2010-riot/>.

<sup>85</sup> ZigZag, *No Time for the Olympics*, 14 February 2010, 13 July 2012 <http://vancouver.mediacoop.ca/olympics/>.

<sup>86</sup> ZigZag, “Stolen Games,” *Anti-Olympics Archive*, 14 February 2010, 13 July 2012. <http://vancouver.mediacoop.ca/olympics/stolen-games/6301>.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

people of America stated: “We reject the 2010 Winter Olympics on sacred and stolen territory of Turtle Island–Vancouver, Canada.”<sup>88</sup> This protest gathered strength when hundreds, if not thousands, of Indigenous people attended the 2010 Vancouver Olympic games, not in celebration, but in order to protest the danger the Olympics and the Canadian corporate culture and government posed to Indigenous lands, identity, culture, health, livelihoods, and the well being of future generations.

The Native Youth Movement (NYM) is a group of youth that works to revive traditional knowledge and inspire Aboriginal youth to defend their peoples and territories. In 2008, the NYM representative, Kanahaus Pellkey, inspired many communities with his speeches that noted: “By them choosing to have the Olympics here, it’s opening up our land, our sacred sites, and our medicine grounds. We want investors to know our land is not for sale.”<sup>89</sup> The Olympic fever that gripped British Columbia prior to the Games and the economic excitement it generated massively accelerated the gentrification of the town site of Whistler and the entire province with the building of highways, resorts, and condos (fig. 2.9<sup>90</sup>). The construction of infrastructure for the 2010 Olympics alone added to extensive destruction of traditional homelands of the local Aboriginal peoples.<sup>91</sup>

There were additional controversies about how land should be used for the 2010 Olympic games. In 2006, environmental protests at Eagle Ridge Bluffs in West Vancouver took place when the building of a new highway resulted in the arrest of 20 people, and jail time for 2

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> ZigZag, *Anti-Olympic Torch Light Parade*, Vancouver, 2 January 2010, 13 July 2012, <http://vancouver.mediacoop.ca/olympics/anti-olympic-torch-light-parade-lights-streets/5985>.

<sup>91</sup> “Protesters say Olympics not welcome on ‘stolen land,’” *CBC News* 31 January 2009, 10 June 2013. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/story/2008/01/31/mtl-olympicprotest.html>.

women.<sup>92</sup> Cultural critic and Olympic activist, Kirsten Forkert describes the NYM Olympic protests in relation to the Eagle Ridge Bluffs controversy,

On March 7, 2007, the NYM stole the Olympic flag from Vancouver City Hall, using a crowbar and a bolt cutter. They released a statement two days later, claiming responsibility for the action. In the statement, they claimed they had stolen the flag in honour of Harriet Nahanee, the seventy-three-year old First Nations activist who dies after spending fourteen days in pre-trial jail. She was arrested for protesting the deconstruction of Eagle Ridge Bluffs in order to expand the Sea-to-Sky Highway between Vancouver and Whistler... They (the NYM) drew connection between the games and imperialism, arguing that “tourism is today’s manifest destiny. Excitement, adventure and fun come before food, clothes, shelter and water.”<sup>93</sup>

According to critics of the Olympics, despite claims that the 2010 Games would be the “greenest Olympics” ever and statements about sustainability, the 2010 Olympics would leave behind environmental damage.<sup>94</sup> A part of the Seton band named St’at’imc of Sutikalh, for example, was opposed to the building of the Cayoosh Ski Resort. The band’s argument was that the Olympics were bringing unwanted tourism and real estate sales to their territory while many Aboriginal people went homeless.

The use of Aboriginal symbolism and imagery as a commodity also created controversy in the 2010 Olympics. Local Aboriginal people, as well as the Inuit, were concerned with an Inuksuit (fig. 2.10<sup>95</sup>) being used as the symbol for the games. The former Nunavut Commissioner Peter Irniq stated that the Inuksuit is a culturally important symbol for the Inuit:

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<sup>92</sup> *From Protest to Resistance: A Report on the Campaign Against the 2010 Winter Olympics*, ZigZag, 2002-2010, Coast Salish Territory, 8 July 2012  
<http://autonomousresistance.files.wordpress.com/2010/08/anti-2010-report1.pdf>.

<sup>93</sup> Kirsten Forkert, “Bread and Five-Ring Circuses: Art, Activism, and the Olympic Games in Vancouver and London,” *Imagining Resistance: Visual Culture and Activism in Canada*, ed. Kirsty Robertson and J. Keri Cronin (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011) 156.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Jeff Vinnick (emblem designer), *Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympic Logo*, 2010, Vancouver, 12 July 2012  
<http://www.chethstudios.net/2012/07/olympics-logo-evolution-over-the-years-1924-2016.html>.

“The Inuit never build Inuksuit with head, legs and arms. I have seen Inuksuit built more recently, 100 years maybe by non-Inuit Nunavut, with head, legs and arms. These are not called Inuksuit. These are called Inunguat, imitation of man.”<sup>96</sup> Local Aboriginal groups also expressed annoyance that the design did not reflect the Coast Salish and Interior Salish culture, from the region the Olympics were being held. Rather, the symbolism appropriated a symbol of the Inuit, who are Indigenous to the Arctic, and resignified it as a pan-nation image for the games. One Chief, Stewart Phillip, president of the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, said that the design lacked dignity, comparing it to Pac-Man (fig. 2.11 <sup>97</sup>). Edward John, Grand Chief of the First Nations Summit, noted that leaders were so upset with this issue that they were willing to walk out on the unveiling ceremony.

While designing the 2010 Olympics, officials anticipated individuals and groups would be interested in voicing their concerns with the Olympics and the politics surrounding the games. “Free speech” areas were devised. This special device was also used during the 2008 Olympics in Beijing.<sup>98</sup> However, in Canada, lawful protest is legal and can be practiced anywhere, which is what many artists did. Considering the debates surrounding land and how the Aboriginal people should be represented, many artists made work to testify to a range of issues in the anti-2010 protests.

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<sup>96</sup> Dwight Reinhardt, “2010 Winter Olympics opens this weekend,” *The Examiner* 12 February 2010, 18 March 2012. <http://www.examiner.com/article/2010-winter-olympics-opens-this-weekend>.

<sup>97</sup> *Pac-Man*, <http://synergizmo.com/who-is-the-face-of-video-games/>.

<sup>98</sup> “2010 Olympic security plans include ‘free speech areas,’” *CBC News* 8 July 2009, 18 March 2012. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/story/2009/07/08/bc-olympic-security-plans-free-speech-areas.html>.

## Part 2 - Homework

*Canada is a test case for a grand notion - the notion that dissimilar peoples can share lands, resources, power and dreams while respecting and sustaining their differences. The story of Canada is the story of many such peoples, trying and failing and trying again, to live together in peace and harmony.*

*But there cannot be peace or harmony unless there is justice. It was to help restore justice to the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Canada, and to propose practical solutions to stubborn problems, that the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples was established.<sup>99</sup>*

– Royal Commission on Aboriginal People

In November of 2011, I had the opportunity to hear Cindy Blackstock speak at the University of Saskatchewan. In her talk, Blackstock focused on several of her campaigns that challenge Canadians to bear witness to “the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal case and help 160,000 First Nations children get culturally based and equitable child welfare services.”<sup>100</sup> Blackstock’s campaign features *7 Free Ways to Make a Difference*.<sup>101</sup> These include signing up online to support a number of causes, including one campaign entitled *Shannen’s Dream*.<sup>102</sup> Blackstock’s use of public online media outlets, such as youtube.com, to share videos provides an excellent example of how the immediacy of visual culture can be used to disrupt and extend

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<sup>99</sup> Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, *Highlights from the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (Ottawa: Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 1996), 15 September 2011 <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100014597#chp1>.

<sup>100</sup> *i am a witness: Canadian Human Rights Tribunal Hearing*, 2013, First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada, 5 December 2011 <http://www.fncaringsociety.ca/i-am-witness>.

<sup>101</sup> *7 Free Ways to Make a Difference*, 2013, First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada, 5 December 2011 <http://www.fncfcs.com/what-you-can-do>.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

national imaginaries. Having read these online campaigns and watched the online videos, I am in no doubt that Canada is in a current state of internal crisis and emergency. Canada's government is choosing to turn its back on Aboriginal communities in need and refusing to speak about the unfair treatment of Aboriginal peoples.

In the campaign, *Shannen's Dream*, Blackstock introduces us to Shannen Koostachin (fig. 2.12<sup>103</sup>), a young woman who began "the movement for 'safe and comfy' schools, quality culturally-based education for First Nations' children called the *Attawapiskat School Campaign*."<sup>104</sup> As Shannen pointed out, the school grounds on Attawapiskat First Nation were contaminated with thousands of gallons of diesel fuel. The federal government had placed portable trailers on the contaminated playground in an attempt to replace the school until a proper one could be built.<sup>105</sup> Over time, the trailers became run-down, the heat often shuts off (fig. 2.13<sup>106</sup>), the doors warped (fig. 2.14<sup>107</sup>) and large cracks under them let in cold air. Children had to go outside to move from trailer to trailer and they had few learning resources. These deplorable learning conditions made it obvious that this Northern Ontario community was not receiving even the basic necessities of shelter to ensure each child receives an equitable education. To this day, this situation has still not been adequately addressed.

Blackstock explained that Shannen dreamed of attending university but knew that she was not receiving an education that would help her fulfill this dream. The children of Attawapiskat

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<sup>103</sup> *National Day of Action*, 2008, Ottawa, 10 December 2011 <http://blogs.cuit.columbia.edu/rightsviews/2011/11/07/realizing-shannens-dream-the-fight-for-quality-education-for-first-nations-in-canada/>.

<sup>104</sup> *Shannen's Dream*, 2013, First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada, 5 December 2011 <http://www.fncfcs.com/shannens-dream>.

<sup>105</sup> *Shannen's Dream – Timeline and Documents*, 2013, First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada, 5 December 2011 <http://www.fncfcs.com/shannens-dream-timeline-and-documents>.

<sup>106</sup> *The Grade 8 Classroom (32 students)*, Attawapiskat, 10 December 2011 <http://www.attawapiskat-school.com/Photos/Pages/Attawapiskat.html#11>.

<sup>107</sup> Attawapiskat, 10 December 2011 <http://www.attawapiskat-school.com/Photos/Pages/Attawapiskat.html#12>.

First Nation launched a campaign and reached out to non-Aboriginal children to write letters demanding a school (fig. 2.15 <sup>108</sup>).<sup>109</sup> Children from across Canada answered the call from the Attawapiskat children to write letters to the federal government, resulting in three Ministers of Indian Affairs promising to build a school, but that promise was broken.<sup>110</sup> The children kept writing and when the Minister of Indian Affairs, Chuck Strahl, wrote in April of 2008 to say the federal government could not fund a new school, the children of Attawapiskat First Nation took further action.<sup>111</sup> Shannen and her classmates refused to be ignored. With the money initially raised for an entire group of students to attend a field trip to Niagara Falls, the Grade 8 class sent Shannen and two others to meet with Minister Strahl in June of 2008.<sup>112</sup>

In this meeting, Minister Strahl explained that the Canadian government could not afford to build Attawapiskat First Nation a school.<sup>113</sup> Shannen told him that she did not believe him and that she would never give up.<sup>114</sup> She then spoke to thousands asking for help at an education rights conference at the University of Toronto in 2009.<sup>115</sup> Shannen's leadership was remarkable and she was nominated as an ambassador for all the children of Attawapiskat for the International Children's Peace Prize given out by the Nobel Laureates.<sup>116</sup> In December of 2009, Minister Strahl promised the children of Attawapiskat a new school.<sup>117</sup> There is still no school built.

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<sup>108</sup> *Letters from school children*, 2013, First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada, 10 December 2011 <http://www.fncaringsociety.com/letters-school-children-2>.

<sup>109</sup> *Shannen's Dream – Timeline and Documents*, 2013, First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada, 5 December 2011 <http://www.fncfcs.com/shannens-dream-timeline-and-documents>.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

Shannen knew that if she wanted to attend university she would have to go to a neighbouring community to complete her high school education.<sup>118</sup> Tragically, Shannen passed away in a car accident in June of 2010. Shannen died on her way to school.<sup>119</sup> Shannen's Dream is a campaign named in her memory to ensure that all First Nations' children receive a good education. The campaign is still active and Shannen's dream is still alive; by signing the petition on the website [www.fncaringsociety.com](http://www.fncaringsociety.com) one is voting that all children should have access to a "safe and comfy school" and equitable education.

The website [www.fncaringsociety.com](http://www.fncaringsociety.com) makes use of photographic testimony (fig. 2.16<sup>120</sup>) to bear witness to the inequity many Aboriginal children face. An online exhibit is displayed to convey "Shannen's Dream – Gallery and Resources." Pictures of children from across Canada holding up letters to parliament stating "I do not like broken promises" (fig. 2.17<sup>121</sup>) are displayed alongside images that document "days of action" in front of parliament (fig. 2.18<sup>122</sup>). Videos are also available of media coverage, as well as films, made by students from mainstream schools in Canada calling for equitable educational funding. Utilizing children from mainstream and non-Aboriginal schools in this gallery and within the campaign is a powerful tool. It allows the next generation of non-Aboriginal children to own the issue of the underfunding of Aboriginal schools in this territory called Canada. These visual galleries are building an activist imaginary in which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth work together to change social policy and advocate for social and cultural justice. This 'imagined community' of activists both young and old, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, are asking the question: Is this

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<sup>118</sup> Cindy Blackstock, "i am a witness," Arts Building, U of Saskatchewan, November 2011.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> *Shannen's Dream – Gallery and Resources*, 2013, First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada, 10 December 2011 <http://www.fncaringsociety.ca/shannens-dream-media-gallery>.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.



our Canada? It is a question that foregrounds both analysis of the colonial present and a call to action.

In late 2011, The Attawapiskat First Nation declared a state of emergency.<sup>123</sup> The condition of housing on the reserve was (and still is) shocking with no running water, buckets for toilets and many sub-humane living conditions.<sup>124</sup> Video activism helped communities and journalists to highlight the conditions at Attawapiskat.

The Federal Minister deflected the issue by blaming the First Nation community for misuse of funding.<sup>125</sup> Blackstock explains that this is a tactic of “political distraction” that avoids attention being focused on the inequitable treatment of Aboriginal people.<sup>126</sup> Attawapiskat did receive \$17.6 million this fiscal year, but this number is not the entire story.<sup>127</sup> People often forget that the costs of programs and services to Aboriginal communities come from one pot – Aboriginal Affairs.<sup>128</sup> Non-Aboriginal communities receive funding from at least three different levels of government. For example, Toronto will receive federal, provincial and municipal funding within a year.<sup>129</sup> The combined annual spending for programs and services per Toronto citizen is \$24,000.00.<sup>130</sup> The \$17.6 million provided to the Attawapiskat First Nation works out to about \$11,355.00 per capita.<sup>131</sup> That is more than \$12,000.00 less per year per person if that person lives on Attawapiskat First Nation. Here, we see some humans are valued more highly than others.

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<sup>123</sup> Charlie Angus, “What if They Declared an Emergency and No One Came?,” *Huffington Post* 21 November 2011, 21 December 2011. [http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/charlie-angus/attawapiskat-emergency\\_b\\_1104370.html#s487209](http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/charlie-angus/attawapiskat-emergency_b_1104370.html#s487209).

<sup>124</sup> Cindy Blackstock, “i am a witness,” Arts Building, U of Saskatchewan, November 2011.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Lorraine Land, “Compare and contrast: Those Attawapiskat numbers vs. Toronto numbers,” *Rabble News* 15 December 2011, 21 December 2011. <http://rabble.ca/news/2011/12/compare-and-contrast-those-attawapiskat-numbers-vs-toronto-numbers>.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

Another fact to consider when looking at the total numbers is that Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC) have capped expenditures for First Nations at two percent a year since 1996, even though the Aboriginal population has grown at a rate closer to four percent.<sup>132</sup> The staffing at AANDC has almost doubled from 3,300 in 1995 to 5,150 in 2010 – the salaries and consultant fees come from the same funds that go towards programming and services for First Nation communities.<sup>133</sup> Consultants (lawyers and accountants) receive about \$125 million worth of contracts from AANDC. As well as irresponsible human resource spending by AANDC, Canadians should be aware that living in northern Aboriginal communities is considerably more expensive. Products such as a bag of apples cost nearly three times more because of shipping expenses.<sup>134</sup> Claiming that Attawapiskat used their funds irresponsibly is indeed a political distraction, as Blackstock notes, to keep Canadians from understanding who is the irresponsible party .

On June 10th 2009, Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologized to the Aboriginal people of Canada for the injustices of the Residential Schools.<sup>135</sup> As Blackstock states: “I’m sorry means you don’t have to say it twice.” This is the message Blackstock gave at her public talk at the University of Saskatchewan. With all the injustices that the government of Canada is committing towards the Aboriginal people of Canada, an apology will be needed again. To help avoid the need for an apology Blackstock explained to her audience that they could follow the First Nations’ human rights case against the federal government for under-funding children’s welfare services on reserves on the *First Nations Caring Society website*, ([www.fncaresociety.com](http://www.fncaresociety.com)). The campaign *i am a witness* helps to educate Canadians on the

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> *Residential Schools Apology*, Prime Minister Stephen Harper, 10 June 2009, Ottawa, 21 December, 2011 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qo5cG-RjE8Y>.

state of emergency many First Nations communities are facing. According to the website, First Nations' children are greatly over-represented in child welfare care.

As of May of 2005, the First Nations Caring Society report, *Wen: De The Journey Continues: The national policy review on First Nations Child and Family Services Research Project - Phase Three*<sup>136</sup> (Wen: De), found that 0.67% of non-Aboriginal children were in child welfare care in three sample provinces in Canada as compared to 10.23% of status Indian children. Overall, there are more First Nations children in child welfare care in Canada than at the height of residential schools. As The First Nations Caring Society states:

First Nations children are entering child welfare care at increasing rates. According to federal government figures the number of status Indian children entering child welfare care rose 71.5% nationally between 1995-2001.<sup>137</sup>

For many Aboriginal children who enter the child welfare system their families are victim to circumstances they cannot control, such as poverty.

Federal underfunding to First Nations' communities results in a shortage of essential needs, such as proper nutrition and learning resources. This is not a result of parental neglect. However, in many cases this is the exact reason Aboriginal children enter child welfare services. As The First Nations Caring Society states:

The Canadian Incidence Study on Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS) has found that First Nations children come to the attention of child welfare authorities for different reasons than non-Aboriginal children. First Nations are not more likely to experience abuse than non-Aboriginal

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<sup>136</sup> *Wen: De The Journey Continues: The national policy review on First Nations Child and Family Services Research Project*, Dr. John Loxley, et al., 2005, First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada, 30 June 2012 <http://www.fncaringsociety.com/sites/default/files/WendeJourneyContinues.pdf>.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

children. First Nations children are more likely to be reported for neglect which is driven by poverty, poor housing and caregiver substance misuse.<sup>138</sup>

Because First Nations communities are only funded federally, the province does not always top up the funds required for adequate welfare services. This creates a two-tiered welfare system where there is more money for children off reserve. Funding is based on a segregated geography that speaks to the ongoing legacies of the nation's colonial mind-set.

The federal government's own books reflect the need for improvements in child welfare services on reserves.

Repeated reports, including by the Auditor General of Canada (2008) and Standing Committee on Public Accounts (2009) confirm that federal government funding for child welfare services on reserves is inadequate and must be changed in order to ensure First Nations children and families on reserves receive a comparable and culturally based child welfare services. Although the federal government has been aware of the shortfalls in its child welfare funding for over nine years, it has implemented only modest improvements in three provinces.<sup>139</sup>

Yet, too little is being done financially, as outlined in previous arguments in this paper. The children in Aboriginal communities are falling between the cracks. Canada is failing to provide basic necessities for children. Proper funding not only allows for education and housing but for a greater sense of self. More Canadians need to be aware of the neglect the government has placed upon Aboriginal children. The Aboriginal Children of Canada can no longer be "unspeakable," ignored and marginalized. Canada and all non-Indigenous Canadians needs to continue doing their homework on social justice issues. Now is the time for vigilant witnessing. In this particular moment of extreme decolonizing urgency, the visual arts has a role to play in addressing the colonial legacy of Canada through testimony.

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

As RCAP notes, Canada has a long and violent colonial history. Treaties were signed amongst the European and Indigenous leaders. However, many of the written texts were misleading or were only signed after extreme force including starvation.<sup>140</sup>

A careful reading of history shows that Canada was founded on a series of bargains with Aboriginal peoples - bargains this country has never fully honoured. Treaties between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal governments were agreements to share the land. They were replaced by policies intended to remove Aboriginal people from their homelands. ...suppress Aboriginal nations and their governments....undermine Aboriginal cultures....stifle Aboriginal identity.<sup>141</sup>

The colonial governments of Canada forced the Indigenous Nations during the early 1900s to the brink of genocide with such tactics as, intentional malnourishment on reserves, segregation on reserves, the forced removal of children to residential schools, and the banning of traditional practices of survival and identity such as hunting for food, and religious ceremonies such as the Potlatch and Sundance.<sup>142</sup> Power structures were altered between Aboriginal men and women by implementing European gender roles within Aboriginal communities.<sup>143</sup> Christianity was forced upon Aboriginal communities in order to assimilate them, which ultimately resulted in the formation of residential schools.<sup>144</sup>

The echo of the residential school system is still heard throughout Canada. Children were taken from their homes and taught colonial lessons that would create a wedge between them and their homes and communities. The quality of education in the Residential schools was strategically less than that of European Canadians: males learnt about manual labour and

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<sup>140</sup> Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, *Highlights from the Report of the Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples* (Ottawa: Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 1996), 15 September 2011 <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100014597#chp1>.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> *Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Discrimination and Violence Against Indigenous Women in Canada*, 2004, Amnesty International Report, 3 September 2009 <http://www.amnesty.ca/our-work/issues/indigenous-peoples/no-more-stolen-sisters>.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

females about household chores.<sup>145</sup> Children were malnourished and endured heinous abuse: physical, emotional, and sexual.<sup>146</sup> Upon leaving these schools, children had little to no ties to their home, had very few skills that would result in employment and suffered from traumatic memories of abuse and neglect. As RCAP notes, in the residential schools, “Attendance was compulsory. Aboriginal languages, customs and habits of mind were suppressed. The bonds between many hundreds of Aboriginal children and their families and nations were bent and broken, with disastrous results.”<sup>147</sup> The long-term effects these atrocities have had on the Aboriginal communities of Canada, such as loss or confusion of identity, poverty, alcoholism, substance abuse and domestic violence can be blamed on Canada’s history of colonialism and its ongoing reluctance to confront and acknowledge injustices.<sup>148</sup>

In 2004, Amnesty International’s Report entitled, *Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Discrimination and Violence Against Indigenous Women in Canada*, focuses attention on the over 500 Aboriginal women of Canada who have either gone missing or have been proven to be stolen as a result of abduction. The website uses images of the stolen women to give the women a face and an identity (fig. 2.19<sup>149</sup>). The report explains that according to government statistics young Aboriginal women are, “five times more likely than other women their age to die as a result of violence.”<sup>150</sup> This racist and sexist violence has a pattern, one that police

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<sup>145</sup> Sarah Carter, *Aboriginal People and Colonizers of Western Canada to 1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003) 165.

<sup>146</sup> *Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Discrimination and Violence Against Indigenous Women in Canada*, 2004, Amnesty International Report, 3 September 2009 <http://www.amnesty.ca/our-work/issues/indigenous-peoples/no-more-stolen-sisters>.

<sup>147</sup> Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, *Highlights from the Report of the Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples* (Ottawa: Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 1996), 15 September 2011 <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100014597#chp1>.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> *Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Discrimination and Violence Against Indigenous Women in Canada*, 2004, Amnesty International Report, 3 September 2009 <http://www.amnesty.ca/our-work/issues/indigenous-peoples/no-more-stolen-sisters>.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

officials have been well aware of, yet little is being done to disrupt it.<sup>151</sup> According to Amnesty International, the pattern looks like this: racist and sexist stereotypes denying the dignity and worth of Indigenous women encourages some men to think they can get away with acts of hatred; decades of government policy have impoverished and broken apart Indigenous families and communities leaving many women and girls vulnerable to exploitation and attack; and many police forces have failed to institute necessary measures to ensure that officers understand and respect the Indigenous communities they serve.<sup>152</sup>

Amnesty International's Reports (2009) on the Stolen Sisters, disrupt Canada's national imaginary of peaceful co-existence, that was on display during the Vancouver 2010 Olympic opening ceremonies. The missing women are often overlooked in mainstream media: they are some of the many 'unspeakable bodies' in Canada. Contemporary artists and scholars are working to create public dialogue and awareness around these Stolen Sisters, challenging Canada's image as a fair country.

Contemporary art is playing a significant role in addressing ongoing colonial legacies in Canada's colonial-present and, in stressing the need for vigilant witnessing by each and every citizen. Visual culture and art has a way of speaking to its audience in thought provoking ways. Ideas can often be explored more freely by using art as a vehicle of public communication.

Lori Blondeau, Dana Claxton and Rebecca Belmore are contemporary artists whose testimonial performance art explores Canada's national imaginary of a peacekeeping nation. In their work, these artists' disrupt the mainstream cultural narrative of the country's inclusive multi-culturalism, which was on display during the 2010 Vancouver Olympics.

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

Lori Blondeau uses a sobering humour in her performances to communicate difficult knowledge about Canada's colonial history and present. Blondeau is a Cree/Saulteaux/Métis.<sup>153</sup> She completed her MFA at the University of Saskatchewan and is a co-founder and the current director of the Aboriginal arts organization, TRIBE.<sup>154</sup> Blondeau's work has been exhibited nationally and internationally.

Dana Claxton is a Hunkpapa Lakota Sioux woman whose art career has spanned from installation, to video to performance.<sup>155</sup> Claxton's work is often situated in remembering.<sup>156</sup> Colonialism, discrimination and racism fueled her earlier work but she also focuses on the beauty of Lakota teachings in her art as she describes below.<sup>157</sup>

I'm influenced by my own experience as a Lakota woman, as a Canadian, a mixed blood Canadian, and then my own relationship to the natural and supernatural world. So taking that whole bundle of experiences, it all goes in to the artwork, I think that's where the multi-layering comes in because I've had a very multi-layered life. And it's all those experiences that go in to the work.<sup>158</sup>

Claxton has shown her work around the world including screenings at the Sundance Festival, and has been collected by such galleries as the Vancouver Art Gallery and the Art Bank of Canada.<sup>159</sup> She has instructed at the Indigenous Media Arts Group and the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design in Vancouver.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> *Post-Colonial University: Lori Blondeau - Graduate Researcher*, 2002, U of Saskatchewan, 19 February, 2010 <http://www.usask.ca/education/postcolonial/blondeau.htm>.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Tania Willard, *Starting From Home: An Online Retrospective of Dana Claxton*, 8 March 2013 <http://www.danaclaxton.com/index.html>.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> *Dana Claxton: Artist Bio*, 3 June 2013 <http://www.danaclaxton.com/retrospective.html>.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.



The 2010 piece, *Redskin Imaginary*, was a collaboration by Lori Blondeau and Dana Claxton. Blondeau performed while Claxton videographed and projected images on the walls (fig. 2.20 <sup>161</sup>). This piece was shown at a cultural facility called Open Space in Victoria, BC, rather than a museum or gallery. In the documented opening interview available on the website YouTube.com, Blondeau speaks about a woman from her reserve in Saskatchewan who went missing. Blondeau discusses the fact that so many women have gone missing and as a nation not enough is being done to find them.<sup>162</sup> The missing Aboriginal women of Canada and their stories are not being recognized within Canada's public sphere and national narrative.

Blondeau uses art to testify for the missing women whose voices cannot be heard. Blondeau explains in the opening interview that she is Plains Cree and her people consider rocks to be sacred and an imperative part of art-making, which includes pictographs.<sup>163</sup> Traces of the art of the Plains Cree exist throughout the prairies and beyond; however, "unlike the rocks that represent her people, little or no traces of the missing Aboriginal women of Canada exist."<sup>164</sup> Blondeau uses rocks in her performance, *Redskin Imaginary*, as a way to create awareness that many women have gone without a trace (fig. 2.21 <sup>165</sup>), as well as speak to the colonial dimension of this national crime against Aboriginal women. *Redskin Imaginary* uses audio, *Queen Mary's Funeral March*, played during Queen Mary's funeral procession in England, 1953. Using a royal funeral composition that would accompany the death of a queen during a performance to honour missing Aboriginal women speaks to the respect Blondeau wishes to pay. During the performance, Blondeau kneels and crushes red berries with rocks; the berries

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<sup>161</sup> *Redskin Imaginary*, Jackson 2Bears, 13 March 2010, Open Space Victoria, 13 June 2010 <http://www.openspace.ca/node/964>.

<sup>162</sup> *Lori Blondeau and Dana Claxton at Open Space*, 13 March 2010, Victoria, 13 June 2010 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JGY3MXZaCrS>.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> *Redskin Imaginary*, Jackson 2Bears, 13 March 2010, Open Space Victoria, 13 June 2010 <http://www.openspace.ca/node/964>.

represent food and the sustenance of life; the act, although rhythmic, is violent. A projection against the wall of violent scenes is juxtaposed with Blondeau's live performance (fig. 2.22<sup>166</sup>). In the interviews, Blondeau explains that the purpose of the violent scenes shown, is to bring awareness to the fact that many of the missing women most likely have died from violent acts.<sup>167</sup> The performance *Redskin Imaginary* by Lori Blondeau brings the missing Aboriginal women of Canada into representation and uses art as a vehicle to talk about the ongoing violent colonial stereotyping and mis-treatment of Aboriginal women in Canada.

Claxton was the key organizer of the interdisciplinary performance and dialogue entitled "Unpacking the Indigenous Female Body" in 2010 at the Simon Fraser University in Vancouver. This summit focused on the Indigenous female body and how it is represented in art and mainstream media. Blondeau's 1997 image *Lonely Surfer Squaw* (fig 2.23<sup>168</sup>) adorns the conferences poster. Blondeau stands cheekily in a bison fur bikini and boots with a surfboard against a snowy landscape. Claxton describes the image:

It's a great image of an Indian woman. If you think of the body of memorial, as a site of memory, our bodies as indigenous woman have been greatly harmed but also celebrated. I want to celebrate the Indian body.<sup>169</sup>

Claxton organized the event because of racist, stereotypical, sexist and mythical idealizations of the Aboriginal female body in popular culture, historically and contemporarily.<sup>170</sup> As

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> *Exhibitions*, 8 May 2012, Akimbo: Canada's Online Source for Visual Art Information, 3 June 2013 <http://akimbo.ca/45909>.

<sup>169</sup> "Images of Native Women: The academy can now embrace indigenous content." SFU Research Matters, Ruth Wynn Woodward, Simon Fraser University, winter 2010 [summit.sfu.ca/system/files/iritems1/10600/News3.pdf](http://summit.sfu.ca/system/files/iritems1/10600/News3.pdf).

<sup>170</sup> *Symposium bares truth about First Nations female form*, Julie Ovenell-Carter, 8 April 2010, Simon Fraser University: Public Affairs and Media Relations, 3 June 2013 [http://www.sfu.ca/archive-pamr/media\\_releases/media\\_releases\\_archives/symposium-bares-truth-about-first-nations-female-form.html](http://www.sfu.ca/archive-pamr/media_releases/media_releases_archives/symposium-bares-truth-about-first-nations-female-form.html).

Aboriginal artists, Claxton and Blondeau have an opportunity to represent the Indigenous female body in positive ways and begin conversations about what has been unspeakable.

Rebecca Belmore is an Aboriginal Canadian performance artist. Her multi-disciplinary work deals with the “politics of identity” and representation.<sup>171</sup> Born in Upsala, Ontario, and of Anishinabe decent, Rebecca Belmore currently lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba.<sup>172</sup> She attended the Ontario College of Art and Design in Toronto and is internationally recognized for her performance and installation art.<sup>173</sup> Since 1987, her multi-disciplinary work has addressed issues of history, place and identity in the media of sculpture, installation, video and performance.<sup>174</sup> Belmore was Canada’s official representative at the 2005 Venice Biennale,<sup>175</sup> and was the recipient of the Governor General’s Awards in Visual and Media Arts in 2013.<sup>176</sup> Her work has appeared in numerous exhibitions, both nationally and internationally. Belmore’s multi-media art, whether it is installation, video or photography, has a basis in performance, which she sees as a medium shared by old traditions and modern expressions - Indigenous and international. Belmore’s art almost always features her own body. Her physical presence in the work calls forth a sense of loss for something absent, while creating the energy of resistance.

Belmore’s piece, *Vigil*, was performed in 2002 on a corner on the Downtown East Side in Vancouver, which is notorious for being a final sighting point of many missing women.<sup>177</sup> The piece begins with Belmore scrubbing and cleaning the street as if in a ritual cleansing for a

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<sup>171</sup> Diana Augaitis and Kathleen Ritter, “Rebecca Belmore: Rising to the Occasion” Vancouver Art Gallery, 22 May 2008, 15 March 2010.

[http://www.vanartgallery.bc.ca/media\\_room/pdf/RebeccaBelmore\\_MediaRelease.pdf](http://www.vanartgallery.bc.ca/media_room/pdf/RebeccaBelmore_MediaRelease.pdf).

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> *Governor General’s Award in Visual and Media Arts*, 22 March 2013, Canada Council for the Arts, 2 June 2013 <http://ggayma.canadacouncil.ca/en/Archive/2013/Winners/RebeccaBelmore.aspx>.

<sup>177</sup> Rebecca Belmore, *Vigil*, 15 March 2010 [www.rebeccabelmore.com/video/Vigil.html](http://www.rebeccabelmore.com/video/Vigil.html).

burial or washing away the hurt and pain (fig. 2.24 <sup>178</sup>). Candles are lit. Belmore pulls a thorned rose through her mouth in between shouting the names of missing women, which are written on her body, acknowledging their absent presence (fig. 2.25 <sup>179</sup>). The audience stands and watches as Belmore shouts out the names and someone in the distance calls back. At first, I feel a sense of annoyance toward the mocking voice but after some thought, the feeling that someone is listening brings a bit of hope. Belmore lets each woman know that she is not forgotten. Her spirit is invoked and she is given life by the power of naming. Belmore slips on a red dress and one nail at a time, fastens her self to a post, and then tears away the scarlet material holding her to the site (fig. 2.26 <sup>180</sup>). Eventually, she is left in her underwear, vulnerable to the elements and the watching audience. The performance “commemorates the missing Aboriginal women who have disappeared from the streets.”<sup>181</sup> Belmore’s visual testimony acknowledging the disappearances of so many women brings increased public attention to this urgent and violent situation. In this performance she interrogates Canada’s image as a just society, testifying that while the government, police and media were ignoring it at home, the national silence around the Stolen Sisters has been noticed both here and abroad.

Belmore’s 2002 performance, *Vigil*, was concerned with the murders of women from the Downtown East Side of Vancouver, most of who were sex workers. Although concerned friends and family had been asking authorities to investigate their disappearances since the

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<sup>178</sup> Rebecca Belmore: *Vigil and The Named and The Unnamed*, 8 May 2010, 13 June 2010 <http://travelpeapod.wordpress.com/tag/vigil/>.

<sup>179</sup> *An Ethics Of Embodiment, Civic Engagement and A/R/Tography: Ways Of Becoming Nomadic In Art, Research And Teaching*, Stephanie Springgay, 2008, Educational Insights, Penn State University, 13 June 2010 <http://www.ccfi.educ.ubc.ca/publication/insights/v12n02/articles/springgay/index.html>.

<sup>180</sup> Rebecca Belmore: *Vigil and The Named and The Unnamed*, 8 May 2010, 13 June 2010 <http://travelpeapod.wordpress.com/tag/vigil/>.

<sup>181</sup> Rebecca Belmore, *Vigil*, 15 March 2010 [www.rebeccabelmore.com/video/Vigil.html](http://www.rebeccabelmore.com/video/Vigil.html).

early 1980s, an investigation was not launched until 2001,<sup>182</sup> when a man was arrested and accused of killing twenty-six of the missing women. He stood trial for six of them and was found guilty of second-degree murder.<sup>183</sup> Many women are still being stolen. More than one-third of the missing women are Aboriginal.<sup>184</sup> In her representation of the missing women in *Vigil*, Belmore is also bearing witness to the centuries of material and cultural trauma Aboriginal peoples have fared in Canada.<sup>185</sup> Belmore's performances are not simply to correct the convention of national histories or to protest against injustice. They are more complicated in their creation of encounters between art and cultural or collective trauma.<sup>186</sup>

On September 25, 2009 at a press conference during the G20 summit in Pittsburgh, Prime Minister Stephen Harper made this comment; "We also have no history of colonialism. So we have all of the things that many people admire about the great powers but none of the things that threaten or bother them."<sup>187</sup> On July 25, 2010 in Ottawa, Cindy Blackstock addresses her online video community in a youtube video entitled "Is this Our Canada?"<sup>188</sup> In her short video she explains that more Aboriginal children are in foster care than at the height of residential schools, as discussed earlier in this paper. The state of poverty many parents are enduring, she notes, is directly connected to the lack of government funding. The Indian Act – the only racially based act in the world – restricts what those on a reserve can do for economic

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<sup>182</sup> *Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Discrimination and Violence Against Indigenous Women in Canada*, 2004, Amnesty International Report, 3 September 2009 <http://www.amnesty.ca/our-work/issues/indigenous-peoples/no-more-stolen-sisters>.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> *Rebecca Belmore: Vigil and The Named and The Unnamed*, 8 May 2010, 13 June 2010 <http://travelpeapod.wordpress.com/tag/vigil/>.

<sup>185</sup> Rebecca Belmore, *Vigil*, 15 March 2010 [www.rebeccabelmore.com/video/Vigil.html](http://www.rebeccabelmore.com/video/Vigil.html).

<sup>186</sup> *Is this Our Canada?*, Cindy Blackstock, 25 July 2010, 3 December 2011 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Atj2KXATN88>.

<sup>187</sup> Aaron Wherry, "What he was talking about when he talked about colonialism," *Maclean's* Oct. 2009, 12 September 2010 <http://www2.macleans.ca/2009/10/01/what-he-was-talking-about-when-he-talked-about-colonialism/>.

<sup>188</sup> *Is this Our Canada?*, Cindy Blackstock, 25 July 2010, 3 December 2011 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Atj2KXATN88>.

development; until recently, it was not permitted to sell a cow on a reserve without prior permission.<sup>189</sup> The homes on a reserve are owned by the Canadian government, many of them do not have proper servicing. To the social worker who enters these homes it looks as though the parents are not providing for their children. For the most part, the Canadian government is penalizing parents for what they cannot change. Many Aboriginal children in foster care are, unnecessarily, growing up removed from their cultural identity. This means that in the future Canada may have to say sorry, again and again and again.

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

## Conclusion Photo Essay



Figure 3.1 Adrian Wylde (photo credit), Idle No More protests, 11 January 2013. Pg. 85



Figure 3.2 Chris Wattie/Reuters (photo credit), *Idle No More Day of Action Sweeps Turtle Island and Beyond*, 28 January 2013. Pg. 86



Figure 3.3 Dwayne Bird, *Stand Up! Don't Give Up the Fight!*, 12 December 2012. Pg. 86



Figure 3.4 Fred Chartrand (photo credit), *Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence*, 11 January 2013. Pg. 88





Figure 3.5 *Idle No More, Flashmob in Seattle, 25 December 2012.* Pg. 89

## Conclusion

### Homegrown

*One never knows what a book is about until it's too late.*<sup>190</sup> – W.J.T. Mitchell

*...in our nehiyaw weyeswewna (Cree laws), when we say we going to do something, the spirit world listens, your keepers listen and our ancestors listen. When we say we are going to go “support”, we mean “e we ni towh setohks ka ke yak”.. this term means we are doing more than supporting, our keepers, spirits etc are going too, so the ones that are listening will begin to “pave” the journey there for you so you may arrive safe and unharmed. – Sylvia McAdam (founding member of Idle No More)*<sup>191</sup>

As I finish writing this thesis, the *Idle No More* campaign is gathering international recognition. It is a homegrown, Saskatchewan, Treaty 6, Turtle Island movement that has gone global. *Idle No More* is a movement that is both home and away. In hundreds of teach-ins across the country, geared to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, *Idle No More* is educating Canadians about treaties, the Indian Act, Bill C-45, and more. In multiple sites, including mainstream media, and news programs (fig. 3.1<sup>192</sup>), testimonial public

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<sup>190</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Live and Loves of Images* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005) 1.

<sup>191</sup> *nehiyaw weyeswewna (Cree laws) – saw doing something, the spirit world listens...* Sylvia McAdam, written by Devon Meekis, 9 December 2012, Idle No More, 8 May 2013 [www.idlenomore.ca](http://www.idlenomore.ca).

<sup>192</sup> Adrian Wyld (photo credit), *Idle No More Protests*, Ottawa, 11 January 2013, 9 March 2013 <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2013/01/11/idle-no-more-protests.html>.

spectacles such as protests, flash-mobs, round dances, gatherings and blockades (fig. 3.2<sup>193</sup>); public art, such as posters (fig. 3.3<sup>194</sup>); and in online social media sites such as facebook, twitter and website blogs, *Idle No More* is actively disrupting Canada's National Imaginary as a fair country in its fight for just and accurate media representation of Indigenous peoples and their issues.

The goals of the *Idle No More* (INM) movement are to re-establish the nation-to-nation treaty relationship between First Nations people and the Government of Canada; address sovereignty issues; and establish social and environmental sustainability.<sup>195</sup> In November of 2012, four activists initiated the movement - Nina Wilson, Sheelah Mclean, Sylvia McAdam and Jessica Gordonin - in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan during a teach-in<sup>196</sup> at the community centre, Station 20 West.<sup>197</sup> The teach-in entitled "Idle No More" was developed in response to Prime Minister Stephen Harper's introduction of Bill C-45.

Bill C-45 is a large omnibus bill, which introduces measures that weaken the Indian Act and environmental protection laws, such as the Environmental Assessment Act and the Navigation Protection Act. CBC lists the changes in Bill C-45 on their website and they include:

**Indian Act:** First Nations communities can now lease designated reserve lands if a majority attending a meeting called for that purpose vote to do so, regardless of how many people show

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<sup>193</sup> Chris Wattie/Reuters (photo credit), *Idle No More Day of Action Sweeps Turtle Island and Beyond*, Ottawa, 28 January 2013, 9 March 2013 <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2013/01/28/idle-no-more-day-action-sweeps-turtle-island-and-beyond-147302>.

<sup>194</sup> Dwayne Bird, *Stand Up! Don't Give Up the Fight!*, December 2012, 9 March 2013 <http://rabble.ca/blogs/bloggers/apihtawikosisan/2012/12/idle-no-more-theres-good-reason-natives-are-restless>.

<sup>195</sup> Jessica Gordon, "INM Teach In Tool Kit – Lesson Plan Template," 15 March 2013 <http://idlenomore.ca/education>.

<sup>196</sup> According to "web definitions" a teach-in is an extended session (as on a college campus) for lectures and discussion on an important and usually controversial issue.

<sup>197</sup> Jessica Gordon, "INM Teach In Tool Kit – Lesson Plan Template," 15 March 2013 <http://idlenomore.ca/education>.

up. Previously, approval required the support of a majority of eligible voters.

**Navigation Protection Act:** Under the act, major pipeline and power line project advocates aren't required to prove their project won't damage or destroy a navigable waterway it crosses, unless the waterway is on a list prepared by the transportation minister. *Idle No More* claims the amendments remove that protection for 99.9 per cent of lakes and rivers in Canada.

**Environmental Assessment Act:** The first omnibus budget bill had already overhauled the assessment process and the second one reduces further the number of projects that would require assessment under the old provisions. *Idle No More* objects to the faster approval process.<sup>198</sup>

In addition, sections of Bill C-45 would change waterway protection to only those that are important for navigation.<sup>199</sup> The organization, Eco Justice, explains the significance of this concept of navigable waterways:

In general, navigable waters include all bodies of water that are capable of being navigated by any type of floating vessel for transportation, recreation or commerce. \*Note: Frequency of navigation may not be a factor in determining a navigable waterway. If it has the potential to be navigated, it will be determined 'navigable'.<sup>200</sup>

Furthermore, this bill would fail to protect native sovereignty; many of these waterways pass through reservation land. The lack of consultation with Indigenous peoples also sparked the INM movement.

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<sup>198</sup> "9 questions about Idle No More," *CBC News Canada* 5 January 2013, 15 May 2013.  
<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2013/01/04/f-idlenomore-faq.html>.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> *Bill C-45 and the Navigable Waters Protection Act (RSC 1985, C N-22*, October 2012, Ecojustice, 15 May 2013 [http://www.ecojustice.ca/files/nwpa\\_legal\\_backgrounder\\_october-2012/](http://www.ecojustice.ca/files/nwpa_legal_backgrounder_october-2012/).

The INM movement was mobilized to help shift the power from government to the people it serves. As Martin Lukacs from *The Guardian* explains:

...contrary to the myth that Indigenous peoples leech off the state, resources taken from their lands have in fact been subsidizing the Canadian economy. In their haste to get at that wealth, the government has been flouting their own laws, ignoring Supreme Court decisions calling for the respect of Indigenous and treaty rights over large territories. Canada has become very rich, and Indigenous peoples very poor... In Other words, Canada owes big. Some have even begun calculating how much. According to economist Fred Lazar, First Nations in northern Ontario alone are owed \$32 billion for the last century of unfulfilled treaty promises to share revenue from resources... Indigenous peoples may have the law on their side, but they don't have the power... Until now. If it's only a social movement that can change the power equation upholding the official's stance, then the Idle No More uprising may be it.<sup>201</sup>

On December 10, 2012 a series of protests and teach-ins were planned, INM called for a *National Day of Action* to coincide with *Amnesty International's Human Rights Day*; and protests were also planned in British Columbia against the proposed Northern Gateway and Pacific Trail Pipelines. The announcement that Chief Theresa Spence of Attawapiskat First Nation was launching a hunger strike was planned for this day as well (fig. 3.4<sup>202</sup>), Chief Spence demanded a meeting with Prime Minister Harper and the Governor General of Canada to discuss Aboriginal rights. On December 16<sup>th</sup>, the Assembly of First Nations issued an open letter to Governor General David Johnston to discuss Spence's demands.

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<sup>201</sup> Martin Lukacs, "Indigenous rights are the best defense against Canada's resource rush," *The Guardian* 26 April 2013, 13 May 2013. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/true-north/2013/apr/26/indigenous-rights-defence-canadas-resource-rush>.

<sup>202</sup> Fred Chartrand (photo credit), *Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence*, 11 January 2013 15 May 2013, <http://news.nationalpost.com/2013/01/23/end-hunger-protest-or-leave-office-band-readies-demand-for-chief-theresa-spence-report-says/>.

Chief Spence ended her hunger strike on January 23, 2013 after members of the Assembly of First Nations, the Liberal and the New Democratic Party agreed to back a number of Aboriginal issues.<sup>203</sup> These issues do not just benefit Aboriginal Canadians, they benefit the entire world, Martin Lukacs notes:

Implementing Indigenous rights on the ground, starting with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, could tilt the balance of stewardship over a vast geography: giving Indigenous peoples much more control, and corporations much less. Which means that finally honouring Indigenous rights is not simply about paying off Canada's enormous legal debt to First Nations: it is also our best chance to save entire territories from endless extraction and destruction. In no small way, the actions of Indigenous peoples – and the decision of Canadians to stand alongside them – will determine the fate of the planet.<sup>204</sup>

Since early December 2012, the message of INM has been spread through flash-mobs<sup>205</sup> (fig. 3.5<sup>206</sup>), posterizing, social media and mainstream media. Rightfully so, as the injustices to the Aboriginal peoples of Canada are many, as Lukacs summarizes:

The evidence – and source of the current anger and unrest – is hard to dispute. While Canada has the world's largest supply of fresh water, more than 100 aboriginal communities have tapwater so foul they are under continual boil alert. Aboriginal peoples constitute 3% of Canada's population; they make up 20% of its prisons' inmates. In the far north, the rate of tuberculosis is a stunning 137

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<sup>203</sup> “Chief Theresa Spence to end hunger strike today,” *CBC News Politics* 23 January 2013, 8 May 2013. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/story/2013/01/23/attawapiskat-spence-hunger-strike.html>.

<sup>204</sup> Martin Lukacs, “Indigenous rights are the best defense against Canada’s resource rush,” *The Guardian* 26 April 2013, 13 May 2013. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/true-north/2013/apr/26/indigenous-rights-defence-canadas-resource-rush>.

<sup>205</sup> According to web definitions a “flash-mob” is a large group of people who assemble suddenly in a public place, perform an unusual and pointless act for a brief time, then quickly disperse, often for the purposes of entertainment, satire, and artistic expression.

<sup>206</sup> *Flash-mob in Seattle*, 25 December 2012, 8 May 2013 <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/article/video-1300-person-idle-no-more-flash-mob-seattle-146549>.

times that of the rest of the country. And the suicide rate capital of the world? A small reserve in Ontario, where a group of school-age girls once signed a pact to collectively take their lives.<sup>207</sup>

It is obvious to me from studying INM and its cause, that Canada was and still is in a state of national crisis. INM is an opportunity for Canadian citizens to defend the environment through adherence to the nation-to-nation agreements of Indigenous and settler treaties. As stated by one of the founders of INM, Sylvia McAdam, “The government is not acting in the best interests of Canadian citizens, so we have to defend them as well. This is what the elders have directed.”<sup>208</sup>

Following the INM movement makes me think about my original questions in this thesis. As participation in flashmobs, rallies, drumming circles, social media, public postering and many more public displays of unrest has swept across the globe, publically accessible visual media has aided the campaigns effectiveness: it has made the message visible, constructing a new visual and activist identity for Canada. INM and its effective use of visual images is absolutely a catalyst for social change. The more people have access to the movement through public visual media, the more it becomes familiar, and an accepted part of the national narrative. The message that treaties should be honoured; governments need to work with Aboriginal Nations; and the earth needs to be protected, is now of public significance.

The case-studies I have pursued in *Away* and *Home* help me think through my original questions:

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<sup>207</sup> Martin Lukacs, “Canada’s First Nations protest heralds a new alliance,” *The Guardian* 20 December 2012, 13 May 2013. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/dec/20/canada-first-nations-new-alliance>.

<sup>208</sup> Sarah van Gelder, “Why Canada’s Indigenous Uprising Is About All of Us,” *Yes! Magazine* 7 February 2013, 15 May 2013. <http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/how-cooperatives-are-driving-the-new-economy/why-canada2019s-indigenous-uprising-is-about-all-of-us>.

- How does the nation-state use visual experience and expression to dramatize its own authority? How does it use visual culture to build the idea of shared collective values and a unified national history and culture across multiple ‘imagined communities’ of speakers, listeners, artists, viewers, writers, and readers (Anderson, 1983)?
- How does the nation-state mobilize visual culture to inspire identification, service and sacrifice?
- How and when does visual imagery and culture help us think critically about what it means to be Canadian, here and now? How does it help us think about the institutions and discourses that structure “common sense” in Canadian society?
- How and when does contemporary art and visual culture open up a space for a plurality of diverse subjects and voices to be heard and seen in public spaces?
- How does art and visual culture engage with the questions: Whose lives are valued? Whose lives/bodies are “unspeakable”? Whose lives/deaths are grievable?

My chosen case-studies have helped me understand the concept of identity (personal, community, institutional, national) as an ongoing process of learned and negotiated social understandings that can be analyzed, interrogated, re-thought and performed otherwise. In my chosen case-studies, we see how effective art and visual media can be as activist sites involved in visual story telling for social, cultural and political change. These visual texts I discuss connect with issues of social and cultural justice and provide powerful new representation for subjects and communities that have been ignored within a national context. They also provide visual analysis that assists viewers to think about how existing



norms allocate public recognition differentially and unequally between differing peoples and they invite viewers to think about the unrealized potential of democracy.

The idea that personal and collective identity can be both shaped and reshaped through public visual culture is liberating. Public space should be accessible to all people (though it often is not) and it is important to recognize that these public spaces often work to establish the norms that legitimate certain subjects, at the same time, as they make others noticeably more difficult to recognize. Trafalgar Square, for instance, has told the narrative of conquest and capitalism in its marble sculptures of national heroes; this is the use and abuse of public art. The Nelson Memorial was intended to be a display of victory and strength. Nelson's achievements in battle provided a template of heroism and national sacrifice for British citizens to emulate. With the Fourth Plinth Project, however, we see the introduction of new, previously unspeakable bodies, prompting fierce public debate in which the concept of the national hero is redefined and more egalitarian notions of the citizen are imagined. Marc Quinn's nude sculpture, *Alison Lapper Pregnant*, created a form of public debate around several issues: patriarchy, femininity, disability and sexuality. Since it was imagined and then completed in 1845,<sup>209</sup> Trafalgar Square has projected a sexed, gendered, classed and raced image of the nation in public memory work. In its focus only on the privileged bodies of white, male heroes, (this public space it established the norms that produced only certain subjects as the heroic citizen.) Lapper's feminine, pregnant body created a vivid and stark contrast to the military and often phallic marble sculptures that adorned this square. As the critical reception of Quinn's fourth plinth project reveals, comparing Lapper to Nelson created considerable social anxiety in the media because Nelson and his military conquests have, over the years,

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<sup>209</sup> *Trafalgar Square – A brief history*, Greater London Authority, 15 May 2013  
<http://www.london.gov.uk/priorities/arts-culture/trafalgar-square/history>.

become a symbol for English nationalism. Lapper's pregnant, nude and differently-abled body shifts the public perception of "the citizen" and the nation's collective identity and opens up to the questions: What new norms are possible? How can they be imagined? In Quinn and Lapper's artistic collaboration, Lapper's body is presented as a new symbol of strength. In the reception of this public art performance we learn a lot about cultural anxiety: as the debate about this work unfolded the increasing number of positive reviews of *Alison Lapper Pregnant* indicate a strong shift in public opinion favouring the inclusion and acceptance of a disabled and feminine body in this once-imperial, male dominated public space that signified the nation or the heart of an Empire. Ann Millett's quote is noted earlier in this paper:

*Alison Lapper Pregnant* significantly responds to, as well as transforms the history of its particular space and interacts with the populations who inhabit that space. Rather than displaying trite political correctness or simple shock value, as much of its criticism wages, the work plays monumental roles in the histories of both disability representation and art. As a public spectacle, it recycles, and contemporizes, the representation of disability as both heroic and freakish. The sculpture in the round poignantly brings into high relief contrasting perceptions and representations of disabled bodies and therefore forges important public debates.<sup>210</sup>

By re-valuing and re-signifying femininity and disability in public sculpture and by interrogating the notion of the heroic citizen, Quinn's sculpture of *Alison Lapper Pregnant* but cites and reconstructs the national imaginary, in ways that open up a discussion about the need for a renewed and democratic public art that enters into the ongoing national debates about "whose lives matter?"

In a later Fourth Plinth Project in Trafalgar Square, Yinka Shonibare's *Message in a Bottle* (2010) tells a story of conquest and imperial capitalism but through another lens, that

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<sup>210</sup> Ann Millett, "Sculpting Body Ideals: *Alison Lapper Pregnant* and the Public Display of Disability," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 28.3 (2008), 12 July 2012 <http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/122/122>.

of an African-British and immigrant gaze. In an interview, Shonibare explains that the piece "reflected specifically on the relationship between the birth of the British Empire and Britain's present-day multicultural context."<sup>211</sup> The history of Britain's culture of "multiculturalism" varies across the differing sites in which it activated, including consumer and business sites. The staging of new bodies and new ideas in the already defined space of Trafalgar Square is immediately contested in the media. This disruption reveals social change in progress. The Fourth Plinth Project and the public debates that ensue reveal a national imaginary that is constantly being cited, contested and re-imagined.

In developing an Indigenous-centered archive of for my chapter entitled *Home*, I developed an educational curriculum about this place called Canada that I certainly did not encounter during my schooling in Saskatchewan. As a Canadian I recognize that I have to examine closely when and how our nation decides to ignore Indigenous bodies, subjects, histories and concerns. I have learned about the central role of cultural practices in shaping and producing national narratives. The 2010 Vancouver Olympics Opening Ceremonies, for instance, told a story of Canada to the world, in which Indigenous presence and visual culture was celebrated. There were more layers to that story. Aboriginal presence was performed in two sites simultaneously: inside and outside the stadium. In the streets, Aboriginal communities demonstrated to raise issues that are consistently forgotten by the mainstream, including that the Canadian state is built on Aboriginal territory and that Aboriginal civilizations have partnered in building this country. Missing from the Olympic conversations were the past and present realities of the past and ongoing marginalization, segregation and assimilation of Aboriginal peoples by the nation-state of Canada. The

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<sup>211</sup> Stephen Adams, "Lord Nelson reunited with his ship – in a bottle," *The Telegraph* 24 May 2010, 29 July 2012. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-news/7759679/Lord-Nelson-reunited-with-his-ship-in-a-bottle.html>.

public spectacle of the Vancouver Olympics both interrogated and aroused scrutiny of Canada's façade as a just, civilized and peacekeeping nation.

In the chapter, *Home*, I focused on activist, online, digital culture and its use of visual images as well as performance in public venues. My chosen case-studies are all about of visual activism, visual culture, and the nation's often "unspeakable" bodies that raise inconvenient and urgent questions that disrupts Canada's national image at home and abroad. Cindy Blackstock is an activist for children in reservations; her representation of children who are not receiving adequate education and school facilities disrupt Canada's image as a first-world-country and a democratic society. Her website brings the underfunding of reserves to the floor as an explicit topic of public debate. Using visual media such as YouTube videos and images on websites has allowed Blackstock to reach and network with a larger group of people. Having studied the visual media on her website I am in no doubt that Canada is in a current state of internal crisis and emergency. Canada's government is choosing to turn its back on Aboriginal communities in need and refusing to speak about the unfair treatment of Aboriginal people in the past and present. Canada's national imaginary as a caring and compassionate society is disrupted by the images and videos on Blackstock's site in which children and adults across the country protest the mistreatment of Aboriginal children as a result of government underfunding. Online videos made by students from mainstream schools in Canada calling for equitable educational funding are available on this site as well as video clips and films of various events to do with Blackstock's online campaigns. Foregrounding the activism of children from mainstream non-Aboriginal as well as Aboriginal schools in the campaign is a powerful strategy that allows the next generation of children to own the issue of the chronic underfunding of

Aboriginal schools in this territory called Canada. Blackstock's online visual galleries are cultural archives that are building an activist imaginary in which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth work together to change social policy and advocate for social and cultural justice. In representing these children in visual media Blackstock makes the point that these citizens matter and that every child in Canada should receive the same educational opportunities and funding.

As the *Idle No More* protests reveals, the long-term impact of the residential school system is still evident in Aboriginal communities that still suffer from Canada's history of colonialism and the ongoing reluctance and inability of too many non-Aboriginals to confront and acknowledge the injustices of a still colonial present. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada acknowledges that healing and the establishment of new relationships embedded in mutual recognition and respect is necessary in Canada:

There is an emerging and compelling desire to put the events of the past behind us so that we can work towards a stronger and healthier future. The truth telling and reconciliation process as part of an overall holistic and comprehensive response to the Indian Residential School legacy is a sincere indication and acknowledgement of the injustices and harms experienced by Aboriginal people and the need for continued healing. This is a profound commitment to establishing new relationships embedded in mutual recognition and respect that will forge a brighter future. The truth of our common experiences will help set our spirits free and pave the way to reconciliation.<sup>212</sup>

This national goal is only possible if all citizens and the government of Canada recognize Aboriginal and treaty rights and Aboriginal sovereignty issues.

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<sup>212</sup> *Our Mandate*, Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 9 May 2013, <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=7>.

In 2004, Amnesty International's Report entitled, *Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Discrimination and Violence Against Indigenous Women in Canada*, focused attention on the over 500 Aboriginal women of Canada who have either gone missing or have been proven to be stolen as a result of abduction. These missing women are often overlooked in mainstream media: they are some of the many 'unspeakable bodies' in Canada.

Blondeau, Claxton and Belmore are three Indigenous artists who had made work about this national crisis, representing the missing women in performance and installation work: making those the lives of Aboriginal women matter in public memory. In their work we see how contemporary art is playing a significant role in addressing ongoing colonial legacies in Canada's colonial-present, and, in stressing the need for vigilant witnessing by each and every citizen.

I have argued from the start of this thesis that public space belongs to us all and that it matters whose bodies are represented there and whose bodies are excluded or marginalized. I have also attempted to historicize each visual case-study, to explore each claim, and to identify the contextual frames in which it was produced, circulated and consumed. I recognize that I only just beginning to learn about the complex nature of these case-studies and the critical discussions they continue to generate.

Our bodies as citizens are regulated in part by a set of societal norms that both produce and constrain us; pushing against these norms we both constitute and redefine our 'selves,' in relationship to 'others,' and our environments, which can be scary for some. This study is only a beginning. I realize that topics such as "the national imaginary" and "unspeakable bodies" can take a lifetime to understand completely, and that I continue to have much to

learn about cultural difference and the use and abuse of it's deployment across differing institutions and discourses. The Idle No More movement and its effective use of visual culture and visual media is an opportunity to continue learning about art and social justice.

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